

# The *Cath Gabhra* Family of Ballads - a Study in Textual Relationships

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## ABSTRACT

### **The *Cath Gabhra* Family of Ballads - a Study in Textual Relationships**

The thesis investigates the internal and external relationships of a group of Gaelic heroic ballads telling of the battle of Gabhair (*Cath Gabhra*). The material for discussion is drawn from Scottish and Irish sources and particular emphasis is given to the Scottish tradition. Part 1 (chs.1-3) consists of an analysis of the ballads as a literary genre and part 2 (chs.4-6) investigates in detail the *Cath Gabhra* texts themselves.

Chapter 1 defines form and content of the ballad genre and includes a discussion of themes, language, metre, style, and different aspects of orality present in the genre. Chapter 2 presents the genre in the context of society and pays particular attention to the attitudes of scribes and ballad collectors and the role of reciters as agents of ballad transmission. Chapter 3 investigates in detail the patterns evident in textual transmission and development, including innovation, loss, and change. Aspects of the dynamics of textual survival and the function of material pertaining to the Heroic Code are discussed in detail as well.

Chapter 4 shows the historical and literary affinities of the different *Cath Gabhra* texts, with particular attention to prose tales on the subject of *Cath Finntrágha* and *Cath Maige Mucrama*. Chapter 5 analyses the textual relationships and differences between the Irish *Cath Gabhra* ballads and Chapter 6 investigates the Scottish texts in the same way.

The Appendix presents a selection of unpublished texts from Irish and Scottish tradition. Material from the holdings of the Royal Irish Academy predominates in the first part while the second part contains texts from the National Library of Scotland, the Carmichael-Watson collection in Edinburgh University Library, and the Henderson papers in Glasgow University Library.



Volume I

**The *Cath Gabhra* Family of Ballads - a Study  
in Textual Relationships**

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I have also consulted material in the Special Collections departments of the National Library of Scotland, in Edinburgh University Library, and in Glasgow University Library. Staff in all these have supplied me with transcripts of manuscript material which made the task of accurate transcription that little bit easier. For their help and courtesy, I am grateful.

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For any mistakes and inaccuracies that still remain in the thesis, I alone am responsible.

Anja Gunderloch,  
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## List of Abbreviations<sup>1</sup>

Italics are used for words in languages other than English.

BDL	Book of the Dean of Lismore
BM	British Museum
BM Eg.	manuscript from the Egerton collection in the British Museum
Cat.	catalogue
CF	<i>Cath Finntrágha</i>
cf.	<i>confer</i> (compare)
CMCS	Cambridge (Cambrian) Mediaeval Celtic Studies
CMM	<i>Cath Maige Mucrama</i>
C.-W.	Carmichael-Watson collection
DF	<i>Duanaire Finn</i>
DIAS	Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> (for example)
EUL	Edinburgh University Library
F.	a version of <i>Innis dúinn a Oisín</i> in RIA F V 5
ff.	folios
fol.	folio
G.	Gillies collection
GU	Glasgow University Library
HC	Meek: <u>The Heroic Corpus in the Book of the Dean of Lismore</u>
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> (in the same place)
id.	<i>idem</i> (the same)
LF	<i>Leabhar na Féinne</i>
loc.cit.	<i>loco citato</i> (in the place already cited)
MMIS	Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
NLS	National Library of Scotland

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<sup>1</sup> See Bibliography for full details of titles and authors where appropriate.

NLS.Adv.MS.	manuscript in the National Library of Scotland formerly belonging to the holdings of the Advocates' Library
op.cit.	<i>opere citato</i> (in the work already cited)
p(p).	page(s)
PTWH	<u>Popular Tales of the West Highlands</u>
q(q).	quatrain(s)
<u>Rel.Celt.</u>	<u>Reliquiae Celticae</u>
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
S.	the version of <i>Innis dúinn a Oisín</i> or of <i>Mór anocht mo chumha féin</i> in: Ó Siochfhradha: <u>Laoithe na Féinne</u>
SA	School of Scottish Studies Archive
<u>SGS</u>	<u>Scottish Gaelic Studies</u>
<u>TGSI</u>	<u>Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness</u>
<u>TOS</u>	<u>Transactions of the Ossianic Society of Dublin</u>
<u>TRIA</u>	<u>Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy</u>

## Preface

### **The Field of Study**

In the context of the present thesis, the term 'Gaelic heroic ballad' refers to the easily identified body of verse material that tells of the exploits of Fionn mac Cumhaill and his associates although a few ballads with Arthurian or Ulster Cycle connections exist. The term 'ballad' was chosen to highlight the narrative dimension of the ballads; no connection with poetic genres that are subsumed under this term in other languages is intended. Gaelic terminology uses *dàn*, *duan*, or *laoidh* for the texts under consideration but these terms have different connotations which may result in ambiguity. 'Ballad,' while not entirely satisfactory because of the wider literary implications of the term, remains a useful label for this genre of heroic narrative poetry.

In the field of Gaelic literature, the ballads are connected with the field of *fiannaíocht*. Although manuscript evidence proves the immense popularity of material concerned with Fionn and the *Fian*, this is not reflected by a corresponding body of scholarly comment and analysis. Much of the published primary material had appeared in print by the middle of the twentieth century; a significant amount of this goes back to the second half of the nineteenth century or even further.<sup>1</sup> Early secondary material concerns itself with the Ossianic controversy, which is not relevant in the present context, or with the historical dimension of Fionn-texts. An evaluation of their value as literature was largely absent in publications that chart the development of Irish and Scottish Gaelic literature. Study of the wider connections of the ballads begins with Gerard Murphy's third volume of *Duanaire Finn* but his analysis did not stimulate much follow-up research. Donald E. Meek has researched the Scottish material, with particular emphasis on the Book of the Dean of Lismore; his work considers oral aspects of the ballads as well as their wider literary relationships and their Irish relatives. A study of a single ballad, *Am Bròn Binn*, has been recently conducted by Linda Gowans and pays particular attention to the matter of reciters. As regards *fiannaíocht* in general, Joseph F. Nagy has analysed early Fionn-material and a recent publication edited by Pádraig Ó Fiannachta gathers articles on different aspects of the subject.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Bibliography, section b: Published Collections for ballad material.

<sup>2</sup> See Bibliography for detailed bibliographical references. Other relevant material is mentioned in the body of the thesis.

The renewed interest in *fiannaíocht* that has emerged during the last decade shows that there is considerable scope for investigation. The provision of primary material that conforms to modern standards of scholarship is an important aspect of this, especially in view of the fact that much Irish and Scottish material remains unpublished. There are still gaps in our understanding of the subject, particularly in the evaluation of the ballads as an oral genre. The present thesis sets out to fill a few of them.

### **Aims of the Thesis**

The original shape of the thesis was to include several case studies of ballads chosen to illustrate textual development in an oral and a scribal context. This had to be abandoned, mainly for reasons of space, but many of the insights gained during study of *Laoidh Fhraoich*, 'The Girl with the Mantle,' '*Dearg mac Droithchill*,' and *Eas Ruaidh* with its purely Scottish counterpart *An Ionmhuinn* have been incorporated into the first part of the thesis. This discusses the ballad genre, its societal background, and the patterns of development that can be observed in a predominantly oral context in particular.

The emphasis of the thesis lies on the Scottish Gaelic ballad tradition although reference to Irish material and the Irish background of the *Cath Gabhra* ballads is indispensable since the oldest texts date back to the time when Ireland and Scotland formed a single cultural province with a shared aristocratic literature. The divergences that developed after that time are important in their own right. The main contention of the thesis is that the ballads, originating in the prestigious bardic context, survived successfully in an oral environment because of their structure and content. Composed for oral performance, metre and stylistic features of the ballads combined with plot structure to stabilise the ballads in a form that enabled easy memorisation and recall. The medium of oral transmission, however, disposes texts towards fluidity and in the Gaelic context, the imagery of the Heroic Code provides an adaptable corpus of material to compensate for inevitable textual development. At the same time, memorable imagery fulfils a stabilising function. Patterns of textual innovation, including accretion, new composition, loss and change of position, emerge which illustrate that textual development in oral transmission is not usually random but limited by the parameters set down by the above stabilising factors and the Heroic Code. The visual impact of the narrative, closely connected with the latter, would seem to play a role in textual survival which has not been recognised. Some

instances of development, however, cannot be explained satisfactorily at the present stage.

The conditions of society in Scotland and Ireland contributed materially to the development of a scribal environment in Ireland and an oral one, with some evidence for scribal activity, in Scotland. Societal attitudes, conditioned by education and socio-cultural environment, explain the popularity of the genre in its respective context and shed light on the differences between Scottish and Irish material. The role of reciters as preservers of the tradition is highlighted by information recorded by ballad collectors, particularly by individuals linked with John Francis Campbell.

Part 2 of the thesis applies the findings of Part 1 to the detailed analysis of the textual evidence of the family of ballads about the battle of Gabhra. Groups of related texts can be distinguished in the scribal as well as the oral context. Historical and literary traditions about this event are disparate and this is also reflected in the different ballads, few of which elaborate on the full story of the battle. The emphasis in the ballads lies on the death of Osgar the son of Oisín/Oisean.

For reasons of space, it has only been possible to provide a selection of unpublished texts from Ireland and Scotland; these are contained in the Appendix. Here, editorial activity has been kept to a minimum in order to show the texts as they appear in the source manuscripts.

## **Presentation**

The presentation of this thesis includes some minor inconsistencies that could not be avoided. Translations have only been provided only for older forms of the language, mostly for reasons of space. As regards spellings, Oisín appears in the discussion of Irish material and Oisean is found when dealing with the Scottish situation; the anglicised spelling 'Ossian' belongs to matters connected with James Macpherson which this thesis is not concerned with. The spelling *fian* is used for war-bands not connected with Fionn while *Fian* is used when the term refers to his companions.

No attempt has been made to regularise orthography and texts are presented as they appear in the source. This includes spelling mistakes and material that has been scored out; it is indicated if items appear in the margins of a manuscript or whether they are comments provided by the scribe, reciter, or an editor of the text in question. In Volume I, Gaelic material is consistently given in italics; in the Appendix (Volume II), italics indicate expanded scribal contractions etc. as set out in the

section on editing principles followed in the Appendix. To facilitate comparison, all texts are given in numbered quatrains, regardless of the state of affairs in the source manuscript.

The sample of Irish texts includes relevant material from the holdings of the Royal Irish Academy and one stray item from the National Library of Scotland. Scottish texts include all unpublished items that came to hand during research although it is likely that there is additional material, for instance in the Carmichael-Watson collection, which remains uncatalogued or undiscovered. Texts from the Book of the Dean of Lismore are quoted from Donald E. Meek's unpublished Ph.D. thesis rather than Neil Ross' outdated SGTS edition. Much important Scottish material exists in books which are difficult to access. Other texts are in need of revision in the light of modern editorial principles. While obvious problems result from these facts, neither rare texts nor revised material have been included in the Appendix. There is, however, scope for future research in the field of publication of unpublished material and re-publication of some older texts.



## **Part 1: The Genre**

### **Chapter 1: Ballads - Form and Content**

#### **Section a: Subject-matter**

Gaelic society in Scotland and Ireland regarded the ballads and their heroic themes highly. Resonances of lore connected with Fionn appear frequently, such as in the Campbells' choice of Fionn's associate Diarmaid as the ancestor figure providing a link with Ireland;<sup>1</sup> the ballad telling of Diarmaid's death as well as prose accounts of his exploits were still current in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The heroic exploits of Fionn and his associates are the subject of the majority of the ballads although there are also a number of ballads, some of them significantly attested in the corpus of extant texts, which draw their *dramatis personae* from the Ulster Cycle or from Arthurian material.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Arthurian material**

An originally Arthurian story has been assimilated into the Fionn-context in the humorous text 'The Girl with the Mantle' (BDL VII). Its theme, a supernatural chastity test, is paralleled by several French and English Arthurian texts.<sup>4</sup> It has been argued that these texts prove that contact has taken place between Arthurian and Fionn-tradition although arguments exist for an origin in the Fionn-context as well as for an origin in the corpus of Arthurian material.<sup>5</sup> Two Scottish versions are extant.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. Gillies: 'Heroes and Ancestors' in: B. Almqvist, S. Ó Catháin, P. Ó Héalaí (eds.): *The Heroic Process - Form, Function and Fantasy in Folk Epic* (quoted henceforth as *Heroic Process*); Dun Laoghaire 1987; pp.57-63.

<sup>2</sup> For example the story of Diarmaid and Grainne which was taken down from the Islayman Alexander Macalister in 1859 and printed in J.F. Campbell (ed. + tr.): *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* vol.3; Hounslow (Wildwood House) 1984 (reprint of 1892 edition); pp.49-60. Another tale told by Alexander MacDonald (Barra) in 1860 (ibid. pp.90-92) was used by the reciter as an introduction for the ballad of which there is a composite version (ibid. pp.74-89) made from the recitation of Donald MacPhie, Hector (?) Boyd, Alexander (?) Macdonald (all from Barra) and Allan MacPhie and Janet Currie from South Uist in 1860.

<sup>3</sup> For reasons of space, the survey of background to the subject matter of the ballads had to be severely curtailed.

<sup>4</sup> For instance *Le Mantel Mautailié* and the *Lai du Cor*, or the English ballad 'The Boy and the Mantle.'

<sup>5</sup> W. Gillies: 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition - Part I: Folktales and Ballads' in: *CMCS* 2 (Winter 1981); pp.47-72, esp. pp.64-66; G. Murphy: *Duanaire Finn* vol.III, Dublin/London (ITS) 1953; pp.154-



The collections of the Royal Irish Academy contain another twenty or so versions that parallel the Scottish examples and a text in DF.<sup>7</sup> A longer recension of the same ballad, probably a development from the shorter text, appears to be confined to Ireland.<sup>8</sup>

Another ballad with an Arthurian theme is *Am Bròn Binn* which is only attested in a Scottish context, with versions dating from c. 1775 to some in present oral tradition.<sup>9</sup> Here, the protagonists are unequivocally Arthurian, e.g. Arthur and Sir Gawain, or figures whose names can be shown to derive from him, although in one instance Osgar replaces Arthur, underlining the dominant stature of Fionn-material within the subject-matter of the ballads.<sup>10</sup> The plot of *Am Bròn Binn* draws on a number of international popular motifs, most notably the one in which a man sees a girl in a dream and falls in love with her.<sup>11</sup> The majority of extant versions were taken down from oral recitation.<sup>12</sup>

The third Arthurian text is the adventure ballad *Laoidh an Amadáin Mhóir*, attested in Ireland and Scotland. Only about seven of the c.23 extant Scottish manuscript versions have been published;<sup>13</sup> as regards Irish material, there are 46 texts listed in the RIA catalogues but only a few versions from different sources have been published.<sup>14</sup> The evidence dates to the eighteenth or nineteenth century, but the time of composition has been assigned to the sixteenth or even seventeenth century, mainly on linguistic grounds.<sup>15</sup> There is a link between this ballad and the Arthurian prose tale *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* in particular although the Arthurian dimension

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158; T.P. Cross: 'The Gaelic "Ballad of the Mantle"' in: *Modern Philology* XVI (1918-1919); pp.649-652; and id.: 'Notes on the Chastity-Testing Horn and Mantle' in: *Modern Philology* X (1913); pp.289-299.

<sup>6</sup> One in BDL and an eighteenth-century version in NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.4. The latter is printed in A. Cameron (eds. A. MacBain and J. Kennedy): *Reliquiae Celticae* vol.I; Inverness 1892; pp.116-118 (quoted henceforth as *Rel.Celt.* I).

<sup>7</sup> G. Murphy: *Duanaire Finn* vol.II, London (ITS) 1933; pp.330-335.

<sup>8</sup> The RIA texts include eleven versions, to which can be added another in a Harvard manuscript of Irish origin which was published by F.N. Robinson: 'A Variant of the Gaelic "Ballad of the Mantle"' in: *Modern Philology* I (1903-1904); pp.145-157. All long versions date from the eighteenth or nineteenth century respectively.

<sup>9</sup> For a full study of the texts and sources of *Am Bròn Binn* see L. Gowans: *Am Bròn Binn- An Arthurian Ballad in Scottish Gaelic*; Eastbourne 1992.

<sup>10</sup> This text is found in J.F. Campbell (ed.): *Leabhar na Féinne*; Shannon (Irish University Press) 1972 (reprint of 1872 edition); p.208 (quoted henceforth as *LF*). For the variants of 'Sir Gawain,' see Gillies, op.cit. pp.62-63.

<sup>11</sup> Gillies, op.cit. pp.60-61.

<sup>12</sup> Gowans, pp.6-29.

<sup>13</sup> It is likely that some of the twenty-three manuscript versions are duplicates.

<sup>14</sup> For details of published texts and some background material see Gillies, op.cit. p.67, note 64.

<sup>15</sup> Gillies, op.cit. p.69.

of the ballad is less explicit. It appears that the ballad draws its themes from Irish, Welsh, French and English Arthurian traditions.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting that all three Arthurian ballads also incorporate a significant amount of other elements, for example the Fionn-context in 'The Girl with the Mantle' and *Laoidh an Amadáin Mhóir* and international tale motifs in *Am Bròn Binn*. The prominence of Fionn-material in these extraneous elements underlines the prestigious nature of this in the ballad context.

## Ulster Cycle material

### Fraoch

The Ulster Cycle ballads can be divided into three different groups, Cú Chulainn texts, ballads derived from the Deirdre-story, and *Laoidh Fhraoich*. Strictly speaking, *Laoidh Fhraoich* belongs to Connacht tradition and is connected with the prose tale *Táin Bó Fraích* and the poetic version of the tale in *Cárn Fhaoich Soitheach na Saorchlann*, with the difference that Fraoch is killed by a monster in the ballad but survives in the tale and the poem to become a victim of Cú Chulainn in the *Táin*.<sup>17</sup> The ballad's other link with the Ulster Cycle lies in the presence of Queen Meadhbh of Connacht and her daughter Fionnabhair as protagonists. Although the place-names in the ballad strongly suggest a Connacht origin<sup>18</sup> it appears that the ballad only survives in Scotland.<sup>19</sup>

### Deirdre

The ballads associated with the Deirdre-story focus on the fugitives' return to Ireland from exile in Scotland and the death of the sons of Uisneach; from their treatment of this subject it would appear that the full story was known to the

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<sup>16</sup> Parallels have been identified with the Fionn-tale concerning Lomna the Fool, traditions regarding Manannán, the First Branch of the Mabinogi, the French romance of *Le Bel Inconnu*, and the English poem *Libeaus desconnus*, as set out by S.J. McHugh: 'The Lay of the Big Fool: Its Irish and Arthurian Sources' in: *Modern Philology* XLII (1944-1945); pp.197-211.

<sup>17</sup> For an edition of the poem see J. Carney: '*Cárn Fhaoich Soitheach na Saorchlann*' in: *Celtica* 2 (1954); p.154-194. The relationships of the texts relating to Fraoch have been discussed by D.E. Meek: '*Táin Bó Fraích* and other *Fráech*-Texts - a Study in Thematic Relationships' (two parts) in: *CMCS* 7 (Summer 1984); pp.1-37 and *CMCS* 8 (Winter 1984); pp.65-85.

<sup>18</sup> Meek, '*TBF*' part I, pp.12-17.

<sup>19</sup> A total of about twenty versions, dating from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, have been recorded in varying degrees of completeness. See also Chapter 3, section a, sub-section *Laoidh Fhraoich*, and *ibid.* section b, sub-section: Complementary, compensatory, and elaborative innovation (*Laoidh Fhraoich*).

audience although few prose texts have been recorded.<sup>20</sup> It is likely that the Deirdre-traditions known in Scotland ultimately derive from the Early Modern Irish tale *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* (OCU) rather than the Old Irish *Longes mac nUislenn* since there is a clear link between the tale and the ballad texts.<sup>21</sup> Poems found in the tale are attested independently in four Scottish manuscripts. Both OCU and some OCU poems occur frequently in Irish manuscripts<sup>22</sup> but the ballads known in Scotland do not appear to be extant in Ireland. It is conceivable that the Deirdre-ballads were composed in Scotland and perhaps never gained currency in Ireland since the OCU poems display a marked bias towards Scottish themes. The version of *Caoi Dhoirdir* from the Gillies Collection incorporates some quatrains from three of the OCU poems.<sup>23</sup> The OCU poems employ loose *rannagheacht mhór* or *deibhidhe*, common ballad metres; these and the common ballad themes and idiom are likely to have helped in their incorporation into a longer ballad text.<sup>24</sup>

### Cú Chulainn

Ballads concerned with the Ulster hero Cú Chulainn are extant in Scotland and Ireland. Scotland has contributed *Bàs Chonlaoich* which is well attested with c.22 versions from BDL (XXIII) to the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> This ballad is also significant because of its bardic pedigree.<sup>26</sup> The Irish Conlaoch-ballad begins *Táinig tráth an borblaoch* and is a development from *Bàs Chonlaoich* which is extremely well represented in Irish manuscripts.<sup>27</sup> Many versions incorporate Cú Chulainn's

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<sup>20</sup> Compare Archibald Fletcher's prose introduction to the ballad and J.F. Campbell's summary of the story based on contemporary Scottish sources (*LF* p.19). A prose text collected by Alexander Carmichael and published in *TGSI* 13 (1887); pp.241-257, is problematic because of Carmichael's editorial activity. See A. Bruford: "'Deirdre'" and Alexander Carmichael's Treatment of Oral Sources' in: *SGS* 14, pt. I (Winter 1983); pp.1-3. A sample of ballad texts is printed in *LF*; pp.19-29.

<sup>21</sup> C. Mac Giolla Léith: *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*; London (ITS) 1992; p.25. Several versions of the tale survive in Scotland: the oldest one, in the Glenmasan manuscript of c.1500, probably was originally Irish although there are also two texts of Scottish provenance.

<sup>22</sup> For a comprehensive list of manuscripts containing OCU material and of published texts see *ibid.* pp.27-50.

<sup>23</sup> These are *Ionmhain tír an tír-úd thoir*, *Soraidh soir go hAlbain uaim*, and *Fada an lá gan clann Uisneach*. For the Gillies text, see *LF*, pp.22-24, esp. qq.31-60. The OCU poems are available in Mac Giolla Léith, *op.cit.*, pp.98-101 (*Ionmhain*), pp.130-133 (*Soraidh*), and pp.134-139 (*Fada an lá*).

<sup>24</sup> I hope to investigate the relationship between OCU and the Scottish Deirdre-texts elsewhere.

<sup>25</sup> The twentieth-century text is a fragment. See MacInnes, 'Twentieth-Century Recordings,' pp.124-125. For full texts, see *LF*, pp.9-15.

<sup>26</sup> See this chapter, section c, sub-section: Ballad metres.

<sup>27</sup> About 30 texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries survive in the RIA alone.

lament *Truagh sin, a aoinfhir Aoife* which is also recorded independently but apparently not extant in Scotland.<sup>28</sup>

*Laoidh nan Ceann* is also common to Scotland and Ireland. At least twelve texts, beginning again with BDL (XIX) and extending to the nineteenth century, are extant in Scotland while eighteen are listed in RIA manuscripts, often combined with a prose account of how Conall Cearnach took revenge for Cú Chulainn's death.<sup>29</sup> Minor Cú Chulainn texts that appear to be extant only in Scotland are the unique *Lá da raibhe i nDún Dealga* (BDL XXVI) and the descriptions of Cú Chulainn's sword and chariot respectively.<sup>30</sup>

The final set of Scottish Cú Chulainn ballads, featuring Garbh mac Stairn as his opponent, is problematic since most of these texts show signs of contamination from other contexts. In Donald MacNicol's and Archibald Fletcher's mid-eighteenth century versions, characters from the Fionn-context have intruded in hero lists, although the conflict between Cú Chulainn and Garbh employs characters from the Ulster Cycle. Alexander Irvine's *Fionn is Gara mac Stairn* has lost its Ulster Cycle association and also owes something in style and themes to James Macpherson, as does Stewart's *Is tiamhaidh nochd Gleann comhann*. Irvine's other *Fionn is Gara* ballad is a verse re-working of the tale 'Fionn in the Cradle.'<sup>31</sup>

### Themes and subject-matter<sup>32</sup>

The primary concern of most ballads is narrative; heroic adventure is the predominant theme of the ballads. Subsumed in this theme are the repulsion of an invader or groups of invaders.<sup>33</sup> In view of the traditional third century date for Fionn this is an anachronism since the historical Vikings only arrived on the scene at the close of the eighth century. Their appearance in Fionn-material, sometimes with supernatural overtones, coincides with their appearance in literature in general, in the

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<sup>28</sup> Several other Conlaoch-texts which I have not yet consulted are mentioned in the RIA catalogue.

<sup>29</sup> For selected texts, see *LF*, pp.15-19.

<sup>30</sup> The BDL ballad only appears in N. Ross: *Heroic Poetry from the Book of the Dean of Lismore*, Edinburgh (SGTS) 1931; pp.180-183. For the descriptive passages, see *LF*, pp.1-3.

<sup>31</sup> For these texts, see *LF*, pp.3-9. None of the Garbh mac Stairn ballads or even his name are listed in the RIA catalogues.

<sup>32</sup> To list even a selection of the ballads that tell of the exploits of Fionn and his associates is impracticable.

<sup>33</sup> The defeat of a single invader is described in *Laoidh an Deirg* and the *Lochlannaich* appear in *Mànus*. Ballads that are easily referred to in *LF* or *Rel.Celt.* are not referenced. BDL and DF numbers are given where applicable, particularly in the case of rare or unique ballads.

twelfth century, at the time when Fionn-texts come to prominence.<sup>34</sup> Battle descriptions also belong to heroic adventure.<sup>35</sup> Some ballads tell of how a hero kills a monster;<sup>36</sup> others are concerned with supernatural encounters.<sup>37</sup> Another aspect of heroic adventure is that of an expedition.<sup>38</sup>

There is a set of other subordinate themes that play a role in the ballads; that is, such themes often play a secondary role and are usually combined with other subordinate or primary themes. There are, however, ballads which feature a subordinate theme either alone or predominating over other themes, for example the theme of hunting.<sup>39</sup> Panegyric is another important theme in this category which is present in some form or other in all ballads;<sup>40</sup> elegy can be interpreted as a specialised form of panegyric.<sup>41</sup> Connected with the themes of heroic achievement and panegyric is the theme of correct behaviour in an aristocratic heroic context. Acting in accordance with a strict code of honour does not, however, appear to be represented as the sole or predominant theme of any ballad.

A number of ballads contain a didactic element, often in the form of *dindshenchas*-style lore,<sup>42</sup> or of genealogical information<sup>43</sup>. Linked with *dindshenchas* and genealogy is the historical element<sup>44</sup>. It is of course possible to classify many of the adventure ballads as history of sorts, following the example of many tradition bearers; the difference is that an adventure ballad is usually a self-contained unit while a ballad with a 'historical' theme refers to a wider background of knowledge necessary to appreciate the subject-matter fully<sup>45</sup>. Yet another didactic element would seem to be present in lists, often of prominent and obscure heroes.<sup>46</sup>

The *fianaigeacht*-background of the ballads can be discerned in the theme of nature.<sup>47</sup> The *Acallam*-background of the role of Patrick and Oisean is reflected in dialogue ballads,<sup>48</sup> or in the dialogue frame in which many of the ballads are set<sup>49</sup>. It

<sup>34</sup> P. Mac Cana: 'The influence of the Vikings on Celtic Literature' in: B. Ó Cuív (ed.): *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples*; Dublin 1962; p. 84.

<sup>35</sup> For instance 'The Battle of Ventry' (BDL VI) or the *Cath Gabhra* ballad *Innis dúinne a Fhearghuis* (BDL XXII).

<sup>36</sup> E.g. in *Laoidh Fhraoich* (BDL XXIX).

<sup>37</sup> For instance *Duan na Ceardaich* (DF XXXVI).

<sup>38</sup> As in *Naonbhar do chuamar fá choill* (BDL XVI).

<sup>39</sup> Hunting is prominent in *Sliabh na mBan Fionn* (BDL V).

<sup>40</sup> Panegyric is the subject of *Ard aigne Ghuill* (BDL XII).

<sup>41</sup> As in *Sé lá gus an dé* (BDL XXV).

<sup>42</sup> E.g. 'Caoilte and the Creatures' (BDL IX).

<sup>43</sup> For instance in *Fiafraighis Patraic Macha* (DF XXXVII).

<sup>44</sup> As in 'The Death of Cumhall' (BDL XXV).

<sup>45</sup> An example for this is 'The Boyhood of Fionn' (DF XV).

<sup>46</sup> For instance in *An so chunnaic mé an Fhian* (BDL XVIII).

<sup>47</sup> E.g. *Binn guth duine an Tír an Oir* (BDL XV).

<sup>48</sup> As in *Innis dúinn, a Phádraig* (BDL XI).



is common for such Patrick-Oisean dialogues to contain the theme of contrasting Oisean's glorious pagan past with the less glamorous present represented by the saint's Christian values; often, the theme of nature is featured on Oisean's side of the argument. These dialogue sections differ from dialogue passages that represent a literary device to further the plot. Ballads that feature the *persona* of Oisean as the lone survivor are likely to be at least partially a development from the Patrick-Oisean frame.<sup>50</sup>

Humour is usually present in a number of ballads in a subordinate function.<sup>51</sup>

*Laoidh an Deirg* (DF LXIII) illustrates the skilful combination of different themes.<sup>52</sup> It is primarily an invader-ballad telling of the arrival, confrontation with the Fian, and death at Goll mac Morna's hands of Dearg mac Droithchill from the fictional kingdom of Fair Men. The thematic emphasis of *Laoidh an Deirg* lies on the description of heroic deeds, with no less than four different instances of heroic conflict. Panegyric predominates in one passage but is also inherent in the rest of the ballad, especially in the combat sequences. Similarly, adherence to a heroic standard of behaviour pervades the ballad and is particularly prominent in passages of dialogue between characters which follow strict patterns: the dialogue preceding combat begins where necessary with the identification of the invader and his demands; these are refused in a formalised and courtly way and conflict follows. A Fionn-Goll dialogue consists of request and acceptance and the offer made by Fionn in the request is echoed at the end of the ballad.

*Laoidh Fhraoich* (BDL XXVII) combines the themes of elegy, *dindshenchas*, heroic achievement in the form of a monster-fight, and nature. Overlap exists between elegy and panegyric, and panegyric fits into the context of heroic conflict. The hero's name, Fraoich, draws attention to the *dindshenchas* material and probably assisted its preservation in a number of 18th century versions when the significance of its Connacht connection was no longer recognised.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For instance in the *Cath Gabhra* text *Mór a-nocht mo chumha féin* (BDL XXII).

<sup>50</sup> E.g. in *Is fada a-nocht a nOíl Finn* (BDL IV).

<sup>51</sup> This theme plays a prominent role in 'The Girl with the Mantle' (BDL VII).

<sup>52</sup> DF vol.II, pp.298-317.

<sup>53</sup> D.E. Meek: '*Táin Bó Fraíoch* and other *Fráech*-Texts' Part 1; pp.13-16, discusses the strong Connacht connections of the ballad. For the *dindshenchas* dimension in a Scottish context, see Chapter 3, section a, sub-section: *Laoidh Fhraoich*.

It is evident from these two examples that there exists a connection between themes and form in the ballads, particularly regarding the themes of panegyric and heroic achievement.<sup>54</sup>

### **Surviving ballads and lost texts**

The popularity of individual ballads is often difficult to ascertain. In a manuscript context, 'curiosities' may survive through the diligence of a scribe. In an oral environment, texts without the approval of a critical audience tend to disappear. An unpopular text in a manuscript simply is not read out but otherwise survives as long as the manuscript; an unpopular ballad which is not performed is not passed on to the next generation of reciters and drops out of the repertoire.

### **BDL**

Manuscripts represent a combination of the scribe's - or his patron's - taste and the available source material. The compilers of BDL, working within a stable cultural environment, had every opportunity to tap into a diverse tradition which supplied variant versions for them to choose from in the process of emending their texts.<sup>55</sup> The selection of ballads in BDL is, however, unlikely to represent all texts then current in the West and Central Highlands. The choice would seem to have been dictated by personal taste, with some emphasis on heroic elegy and on 'rare' texts, if the scarcity or absence of some BDL ballads in later Irish and Scottish tradition is taken into account. Often, these are attractive and well-constructed pieces which do not appear to have been able to compete with the largely self-contained narrative ballads that dominate later tradition; also, their themes are marginal to the aspects of Fionn-lore they are designed to supplement.<sup>56</sup> Some ballads absent from BDL are highly popular in later tradition, e.g. the *Dearg*, *Teanntachd Mhór na Féinne*, or *Duan na Ceàrdaich*. Regarding the first two, it is possible that they had not yet made their way from Ireland if the suggested dates of composition (fifteenth and

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<sup>54</sup> For a further discussion of the themes of the ballads see D.E. Meek: 'The Gaelic Ballads of Mediaeval Scotland' in: *TGSI* LV (1986-1988); pp.65-68; and id.: 'Development and Degeneration in Gaelic Ballad texts' in: *Heroic Process*; pp.132-135.

<sup>55</sup> See also Meek, 'Development and Degeneration...,' pp.147-155.

<sup>56</sup> Goll's death forms the background to *A Gharaidh, triallmaid go Fionn* (BDL II). Oisean's old age is the subject of *Anbhfann a-nocht neart mo lámh* (BDL VIII), and nature is the theme of *Binn guth duine an Tír an Oir* (BDL XV).

fifteenth/sixteenth century respectively) are correct.<sup>57</sup> These two texts are invader-ballads, a genre not strongly represented in BDL. There is *Eas Ruaidh* (BDL XX), not a true invader-ballad because of the prominence of the theme of the Distressed Maiden. *Lá dhá dheachaidh sé dhá chill* (BDL VI), a rare text, is significant because of its link to the related prose tale about the battle of Ventry. The final invader-text is *Fleadh mhór a rinneadh lé Fionn* (BDL XVII), another rare ballad which appears to exhibit an imperfect plot.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps compilers chose to include curiosities rather than 'populist' invader-ballads although the popularity of *Eas Ruaidh* is unquestionable.

## DF

DF was compiled on the Continent in 1626-1627, probably from several miscellaneous manuscripts.<sup>59</sup> Although the manuscript contains 68 different ballads - DF II and LXVI are versions of the same ballad - there are some omissions of otherwise well-attested texts.<sup>60</sup> It seems likely that such omissions reflect the material in the sources. The manuscript of DF also contains a copy of the *Agallamh na Seanórach*, complete several ballads, but there is only one instance of duplication of texts.<sup>61</sup> This seems to indicate that the compiler of the ballad material, Aodh Ó Dochartaigh, omitted ballads already included in the *Agallamh* copied by his fellow-scribe Niall Gruamdha Ó Catháin. Ó Dochartaigh's methodical approach to textual material is also evidenced in a volume of syllabic verse, perhaps from the manuscripts that yielded the ballad material, prepared for the same patron, Captain Somhairle Mac Domhnaill.<sup>62</sup> The ready availability of Irish manuscripts in Ostend and Louvain alone illustrates the extent of the diaspora of Irish intellectuals and their books in the early seventeenth century.

DF contains rare and popular ballads. Some rare texts are likely to have appealed primarily to trained poets keen to preserve ephemeral lore. With the decline of the bardic class the interest in this information dwindled, causing its gradual

<sup>57</sup> DF III; p.146 and pp.164-165 respectively. *Duan na Ceàrdaich* may date to c.1400 and could have entered the Scottish repertoire by the time of BDL (ibid. pp.85-86).

<sup>58</sup> A magic mist is described after a quatrain which appears to initiate the final showdown between Goll and the invader but then the ballad returns to the Patrick-Oisean frame of the beginning giving no indication of the invader's fate.

<sup>59</sup> R. Ó hUiginn: 'Duanaire Finn' in: P. Ó Fiannachta (ed.): *An Fhiannaíocht* (Leachtaí Cholm Cille XXV); Maigh Nuad 1995; pp.66-67.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. *Eas Ruaidh* and the *Cath Gabhra* text *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* whose presence in BDL confirms their age.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.66. Ó hUiginn does not specify which recension of the *Agallamh* he discusses. The duplicated text is *Éirigh súas a Osgair* (DF LII).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. pp.47 and 67.



disappearance from the tradition.<sup>63</sup> As there are also instances of ballads with a potentially wider appeal disappearing from the repertoire between DF and later manuscripts it is possible to see DF as an example of an era in which different literary tastes prevailed. One such example is DF XVIII, *Éuchtach inghean Díarmatta*.<sup>64</sup> This ballad may have lost out in popularity by competition in Ireland from *Tabhair éin-digh dham-sa, a Fhinn*, a ballad that appears occasionally in later manuscripts;<sup>65</sup> in Scotland, the Diarmaid-ballad *Gleann Síodh an gleann so rem thaoibh* (BDL XIII) remains popular throughout later tradition.<sup>66</sup>

The gaps in evidence between BDL or DF and later tradition make it difficult to evaluate ballad transmission accurately. In Scotland, few ballads are extant between the mid-sixteenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century. In Ireland, few manuscripts containing ballads are older than the early eighteenth century. The absence of contemporary ballad manuscripts likewise prevents a precise evaluation of the rarity of ballads only found in BDL or DF.<sup>67</sup>

### Later tradition

There are some rare ballads which only occur in later tradition. In the Irish text *Seisear dochuamar re mac Cumhaill*, six heroes describe their favourite sounds.<sup>68</sup> *Ceathrar ar fhichid do bhí againn ann* tells how twenty-four of the Fian are lost in a magic mist for a year after an unsuccessful hunt; when they emerge from the mist Oisín overcomes and kills an ugly warrior who appeared in the shape of a stag during the hunt.<sup>69</sup> Reasons for the relative lack of popularity of these two

<sup>63</sup> An example of this is provided by a cluster of genealogical ballads, DF XLIV, *Cairdius Logha ré droing don Fhéin*, DF XLV, *Innis a Oisín echtaigh*, and DF XLVI, *Fiamhain mac Foraigh go fíor*, of which no later texts are found in the holdings of RIA.

<sup>64</sup> Following a summary of the story of Diarmaid and Gráinne, the ballad tells how Diarmaid's children, led by his daughter Eachtach, are killed in an attempt to avenge their father's death. Diarmaid-material present in later tradition concentrates on his relationship with Gráinne or the circumstances of his death.

<sup>65</sup> For a suggested connection between this and some Scottish Diarmaid-texts, see chapter 3, section b, sub-section: accretion.

<sup>66</sup> Eighteenth and nineteenth century texts frequently give the initial line *Éisdibh beag mas àill leibh laoidh*.

<sup>67</sup> There is a hypothetical possibility that some rare ballads were also in evidence in some of the many manuscripts that have been lost or destroyed. This, however, is impossible to prove.

<sup>68</sup> This ballad is only extant among the RIA manuscripts in RIA 24 L 15, an unprovenanced manuscript dated 1789. The ballad has been edited from the manuscript by Ó Siochfhradha: *Laoithe na Féinne*; Dublin 1941; p.192. For the manuscript, see also Appendix, Part I, Irish Texts; section a: Irish Versions of *Innis sin/dúinn a Oisín*.

<sup>69</sup> This is only present in RIA 23 Q 18, a manuscript compiled between 1789 and 1818 near Athlone, Co. Roscommon and edited from the manuscript in Ó Siochfhradha, pp.196-197. The editor suggests that the ballad was taken down from oral tradition but does not adduce any detailed

ballads lie in the texts themselves. In the first ballad, the themes are treated too conventionally to stand out from similar ballads containing vignettes of the life of the Fian; the themes fail to become individual or memorable through the absence of striking imagery. There is a lack of clarity in plot construction in the second ballad which may have prevented successful competition with adventure ballads with a more developed plot.

An example from later tradition in Scotland is '*S cumhain leam an iomairt ud*, a Diarmaid-ballad of which an Irish version is extant in DF LXIX, *Cumain liom an imirt*.<sup>70</sup> Set during the flight of Diarmaid and Gráinne and thus complementary to other Diarmaid-ballads, this text did not attain the levels of popularity that ballads about the death of Diarmaid enjoyed. *Leac Ghuill a chradh mi nam chroidh* tells of the death of Mánus at the hands of Goll;<sup>71</sup> Irish versions are attested in DF and later tradition.<sup>72</sup> Another Mánus-ballad, beginning *A chléirich a chanas na sailm*, in which Mánus survives the conflict and is allowed to return to Lochlann, is extant in numerous versions in Ireland and Scotland. It appears that *Leac Ghuill...* never became as popular as *A chléirich...* which has a better elaborated plot and also contains some memorable passages such as the banner-quatrains and Fionn's tribute.

Both '*S cumhain leam...* and *Leac Ghuill...* seem to have been transmitted orally in a Scottish Gaelic linguistic context because their language is Scottish Gaelic with a stratum of archaisms typical of contemporary ballad tradition. To reach this state, the texts must have undergone a sustained process of transmission which suggests that prior to their recording in the second half of the eighteenth century they were in wider circulation than the number of extant texts indicates. Their apparent rarity may be due to two main factors. A change in taste may have gradually eliminated certain ballads which contradicted the mainstream version of events (*Leac Ghuill...* versus *A chléirich...*) or which did not add material that was seen as relevant to existing knowledge ('*S cumhain leam...* versus *Bàs Dhiarmaid*). The second factor takes into account that the extant material does not cover all of the Gaelic-speaking areas at all times. Ballads that are rare in the extant collections may have been more frequently represented than the record suggests while genuinely rare ballads may have slipped the collectors' nets.

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evidence for his view. The manuscript is described in the Appendix, Part I, Irish Texts; section a: Irish Versions of *Innis sin/dúinn a Oisín*.

<sup>70</sup> Found in Duncan Kennedy's two collections in LF; pp.155-156 and DF II; pp.402-409 respectively.

<sup>71</sup> Printed from McLagan 110 in *Rel.Celt.* I; pp.365-368.

<sup>72</sup> DF II; pp.318-329.

Regarding popular ballads, texts that are common in the corpus of material collected from Scottish oral tradition are likely to have enjoyed great popularity with audiences. In a situation where manuscripts predominate, frequent appearance of texts in different manuscripts indicates their easy availability; without the reinforcing role of popularity among recipients and users of manuscripts it would, however, be unlikely that texts would be able to maintain their level of recurrence. In a randomly chosen sample of seventeen RIA manuscripts, the following order of frequency emerged:<sup>73</sup>

<i>Laoidh na Sealga</i>	15
<i>Oisín is fada do shuan</i>	13
<i>Dearg</i>	12
<i>Innis dúinn a Oisín</i>	11
<i>Eas Ruaidh and Laoidh na Mná Móire thar Lear</i>	10
<i>Laoidh an Amadáin Mhóir and Laoidh an Duirn</i>	9
<i>Cath Chnuic an Áir, Mór anocht mo chumha féin, the Girl with the Mantle, and Leacht Ghuill do chráidh mo chroidhe</i>	7
<i>A chléríoch chanas na sailm, Conlaoch, Tóiteán Tighe Finn, and Laoidh Laighne Mhóir</i>	6

A different choice of manuscripts is likely to result in a different list of most popular ballads; strong contenders for inclusion are, for instance, *Laoidh Thailc mhic Treóin*, *Laoidh Mheargaigh na Lann*, *Laoidh Airghinn Mhóir mhic Angcairt na Long*,<sup>74</sup> or *Seilg Sleibhe gCrot* which are represented in the above selection of manuscripts as well. The above ballads are predominantly narrative ones with strong, memorable plots and considerable emphasis on the theme of heroic adventure, with the exception of *Oisín is fada do shuan* which thrives because of the juxtaposition of Christian and pagan attitudes.<sup>75</sup> There are, of course, popular ballads which emphasise different themes, such as the panegyric texts *Goll mear mileata* and *Árd-aigneach Goll*, or *Lon Doire an Chairn* which praises nature, but the general trend shows a distinct bias towards texts that tell a good story.

<sup>73</sup> These are the manuscripts containing *Cath Gabhra* ballads which are referred to in the Appendix: RIA 23 L 34, 23 O 35, 23 C 30, 23 L 5, 23 Q 18, F V 5, 23 O 79, 24 L 15, 24 P 7, 23 L 8, 3 B 28, 24 A 21, 24 A 17, F VI 2, 3 B 9, 24 L 7, and 23 C 26.

<sup>74</sup> This is the Irish title of the other *Mànus*-ballad. It is worth noting that in Irish tradition both *Mànus*-ballads are well represented.

<sup>75</sup> See also chapter 4, Section c, sub-section: Core texts and ancillary texts (*Innis dúinn a Oisín* and *Innis dúinn a Phádraig*).

A similar tendency can be observed in Scottish tradition in the published ballad collections of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

<i>Conn Mac an Deirg</i>	15
<i>Teanntachd Mhór na Féinne</i>	14
<i>Mànus</i>	13
<i>A' Mhuireartach</i>	12
<i>An Ionmhuinn and Duan na Ceàrdaich</i>	11
<i>Dearg mac Deirg</i>	10
<i>Conlaoch and Laoidh Dhiarmaid</i>	9
<i>Eas Ruaidh and Duan Ghairbh mhic Stàirn</i>	8
<i>Laoidh Fhraoich, Taigh Formaoil,<sup>76</sup> and Laoidh a' Choin Duibh</i>	7
<i>Bàs Bhràin</i>	6

Again, distinctive adventure-ballads predominate. Most of them are also frequently in evidence among unpublished ballad texts although rare and apparently rare texts are also extant. The list of most popular ballads may not be representative of the tradition as a whole; omissions such as *Am Bròn Binn*, or the Scottish Variant *Cath Gabhra* texts, serve as a reminder of the dangers of generalisation.

## Section b: Aspects of Language

### Language and adaptability

In their earliest manifestations, ballads employ Classical Common Gaelic. The Classical standard is represented by BDL and DF although occasional vernacularisms occur in both.<sup>77</sup> Although later tradition favours the vernacular, linguistic conservatism can be detected in archaic forms which are preserved occasionally. Change from Classical language to the vernacular would seem to reflect the popularity of the ballads in the post-classical period; in a Scottish context, the extent

<sup>76</sup> This exists in several variant spellings but corresponds to the Irish *Tóiteán Tighe Finn*.

<sup>77</sup> Strata of Middle Irish forms have been identified in several DF ballads by Gerard Murphy (DF III, *passim*); these may be evidence for the antiquity of such texts although it is also possible that archaisms were introduced by composers or transmitters to add to the prestige of a text. Constraints of space preclude a more detailed discussion of this subject.

to which ballads have adapted to Scottish Gaelic conditions can be observed particularly clearly.<sup>78</sup>

### **Heroic Code and formulaic dimension**

To class panegyric only as a ballad theme underestimates its importance in Gaelic literature where it provides a significant part of the language and imagery of poetry. In a Scottish context, panegyric has been defined as a 'pervasive system of rhetoric' and 'a highly complex but coherent network.'<sup>79</sup> This system originated in the conventions of aristocratic praise poetry composed by professional poets but is evidenced in its most elaborate and vibrant form in the vernacular Scottish Gaelic poetry. Since classical and vernacular composition coexisted over centuries, it appears that mutual influence and cross-fertilisation took place and the Heroic Code branched out from its original context of eulogy and elegy and infiltrated every aspect of Gaelic poetry.<sup>80</sup> In Scotland, the results of this process are in evidence from the late sixteenth century when the earliest extant vernacular material was recorded, beginning with poetry addressed to aristocratic patrons by learned and vernacular poets alike. In Ireland, the Heroic Code is less distinctively and pervasively realised although its presence is evident throughout the poetic corpus. Since the aristocratic class ceased to be a political and cultural force in Ireland during the seventeenth century, the gradual but devastating decline of poetic patronage removed the environment which allowed this particular poetry and its attendant code to flourish and develop as it did in Scotland. Instead, the Irish practitioners of poetry adopted a scholarly and intellectual approach to their art which appears to have inhibited the further development of the Heroic Code.<sup>81</sup>

#### Panegyric imagery

The motifs of the Heroic Code centre on the various characteristics and accomplishments of the subject of eulogy or elegy. The poet is able to draw on

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<sup>78</sup> The extent to which dialectal forms are present in ballads is difficult to evaluate. In Irish manuscripts, scribal contractions often serve to obscure such information, and in Scottish texts, the boundaries between orthographic idiosyncrasies and dialectal forms are usually not clearly demarcated.

<sup>79</sup> J. MacInnes: 'The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry and its Historical Background' in: *TGSI* 50 (1976-1978); p.435.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* pp.447-448 and 461.

<sup>81</sup> S. Ó Tuama (ed.) and T. Kinsella (tr.): *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed*; Dolmen Press 1981; pp.XIX-XXIII.



imagery relating to the geographical, genealogical and historical background of the person to be praised; his - for women are rarely protagonists in this heroic world of imagery - personal endowments and social roles are described. His physical roles as hunter or warrior are as important as his personal beauty; his household and entertainments play a role, too. Kennings may be used for the hero; destiny and other protagonists may be introduced in the context of praise. In the specialised case of elegy, imagery relating to death becomes important. While this outline of the subject-matter of the Heroic Code indicates that it equipped the poet with imagery to cover most panegyric eventualities it must be emphasised that heroic achievement and aristocratic qualities play a prominent role.<sup>82</sup> As any casual survey of a seventeenth century vernacular piece of poetry proves, the imagery of the Heroic Code is capable of elaboration in great detail and vividness of description and imagination. This is, of course, an idealised world in which verisimilitude takes precedence over reality although description is generally realistic enough to allow the audience to have a clear mental picture of the person or scene described. The terms 'commonplace,' 'stock phrase' or 'stock image' that are often applied to the motifs of the Heroic Code are technically accurate but do not explain its literary significance with regard to a Gaelic audience. Panegyric imagery is always interconnected and thus able to evoke in memory linked sequences of imagery and permutations realised differently in other examples of poetry. An audience familiar with the Heroic Code is able to appreciate the elaborate detail and the associations it evokes and expects this as an integral feature of poetic achievement. The Heroic Code is indeed 'a coherent system of rhetoric of great resonance and evocative power.'<sup>83</sup>

The heroic and aristocratic bias of many ballad themes makes them an ideal vehicle for panegyric imagery. In the following passage<sup>84</sup> italics denote material which belongs to the Heroic Code and the numbers in brackets indicate how many different motifs appear per line. 'B' and bold print mark motifs that do not strictly belong to the Heroic Code but form a specialised class of heroic motifs, often extended over a couplet or a quatrain in some cases, which appear in several ballads in a similar context. 'DF' denotes motifs that are represented in identical or near-identical form in the oldest extant text, DF LXIII.<sup>85</sup> 'DF' indicates that a motif

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<sup>82</sup> For a detailed list of the motifs found in a Scottish Gaelic vernacular context see R. Ó Maolalaigh, N.A. Jones, R.I. Black (eds.): *Celtic Civilisation 1995-6 Term 3 Sourcebook: The Modern World*; Edinburgh University (Department of Celtic) 1996; pp.60-61.

<sup>83</sup> MacInnes, op. cit. pp.44-45.

<sup>84</sup> Printed in *Rel.Celt* I, pp.206-207, from the Rev. Alexander Campbell's late eighteenth century text of *Dàn an Deirg* collected in the Isle of Skye.

<sup>85</sup> Printed in *DF*, pp.298-317.

appears in a different form from DF but is still clearly related to it thematically. 'X' denotes that the motifs in question are different from those found in DF.

- |     |   |           |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 53. | <i>Gluaisidir a sud Mac Morn',</i>                  | (1) X     |
|     | <i>Na chullaidh chath chruaidh choraig,</i>         | (1) DF    |
|     | <i>A chas comhrag an Laoich shlain,</i>             | (2) X X   |
|     | <i>'S meirg a bhrosnaich na cho' aill.</i>          | (1) X     |
| 54. | <i>Is togaidir a sin an fhollachd</i>               | (1) X     |
|     | <i>Eidir an dithis Mhili ro ghlan,</i>              | (1) X     |
|     | <i>Ri snaidh chlogad is cheann.</i>                 | (1) DF    |
|     | <i>Eidir Mac Druì' bheil is Iullainn -</i>          | (1) DF    |
| 55. | <i>Is togaidir is deantair an cleas,</i>            | (1) DF    |
|     | <i>Aig an dreinidir a mor chleas,</i>               | (1) DF    |
|     | <b><i>Gu n' thost fhir Thein is Eirin uile,</i></b> | B DF      |
|     | <b><i>Ri fras bheumannan nu h iorghuil.</i></b>     | B (1) DF  |
| 56. | <b><i>Seachd oich' agus seachd là</i></b>           | B DF      |
|     | <b><i>Bu tuirseach michd agus mnai',</i></b>        | B DF      |
|     | <i>Go n' chaoidheadh an Dearg aindir,</i>           | (2) DF DF |
|     | <i>Le Mac Morn' na 'm beumanan.</i>                 | (2) DF DF |

Passages of heroic conflict like the above are apt to attract a high density of panegyric imagery by reason of their subject-matter. Another striking feature is the stability of the motifs, even in the case of two versions which are not directly related: Campbell's text has only five lines whose imagery is not paralleled in DF while all other motifs are either identical or recognisably related in both texts. Such motival stability throughout versions of a given ballad is an important feature of the ballad tradition in Ireland and Scotland. While there are motifs that recur in the same form in different ballads, diversity in the treatment of detail in panegyric motifs is also a prominent characteristic of the ballads.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> See also chapter 3, section d, sub-section: Motival stability.

The existence of a number of recurrent stable motifs poses the question whether they are formulae according to the original definition by Milman Parry of 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.'<sup>87</sup> The 'essential ideas' can be equated with the themes of the Heroic Code as outlined above but the criterion of regular occurrence would seem to exclude the large body of motifs where the same idea is expressed in different ways. While Parry also defines a type of formulae which express similar ideas in similar words in the same metrical conditions and classifies them as a set of 'systems',<sup>88</sup> such systems do not include all instances of imagery belonging to the Heroic Code. To explain this, we have to take into account the differences between the definition's original context of Homer's hexameter and the *dán díreach*-based ballad metres. The hexameter puts up to seventeen syllables at the poet's disposal and requires specific sequences of long and short syllables separated by equally specific caesuras.<sup>89</sup> In the ballads, the most common metres ideally have only seven syllables and long or short syllables or rather vowels are only relevant in rhyming words. Regarding rhyme, there is end-rhyme in couplets in *deibhidhe*-based metres and end-rhyme in the second and fourth lines as well as internal rhyme in couplets in *rannaigheacht*-based metres. The word-length requirements of rhyming words in different metres add a further dimension of variety which is not paralleled in the hexameter.<sup>90</sup> To follow Parry, we would have to postulate a different set of formulae to be used in each of the metres. This would create an extremely unwieldy system of little practical use, even allowing for the possibility of overlap between metres.<sup>91</sup> The criterion of metrical usefulness of formulae<sup>92</sup> cannot be applied to Gaelic poetry with ease. It seems reasonable to suggest that the metrical structure of Gaelic poetry, and the ballads, encourages variety of verbal expression.

However, formulae can be identified within the ballads. Patronymics are frequently used; e.g. *mac Cumhaill* for Fionn, *mac Morna* for Goll, and *mac Calpruinn* or *mac Ailpein* for St. Patrick. Name-epithet or noun-epithet formulae appear; e.g. *righ Teamhra*, *Fionn Almhuinn*, *a chléirich chàidh*, *laoch làn*, or *Osgar*

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<sup>87</sup> M. Parry: 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style' in: *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 41 (1930); p.80.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p.85.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p.126.

<sup>90</sup> For an analysis of ballad metres see this chapter, section c: Metres and Stylistic Features.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. J. Ross: 'Formulaic Composition in Gaelic Oral Literature' in: *Modern Philology* 57 (1959-1960); p.4.

<sup>92</sup> Parry, *op.cit.* pp.73 and 126-131.



*fearrdha*. The genitive epithet falls into the same category: *rìgh na Féinne*, *mac an àrd-fhlatha*, *Raighne an aighidh mhir*, or *Cath Gabhra nam beumannan*. Unlike the situation identified for such formulae in Homer, where the choice of epithet for specific characters is limited to a few for the same metrical conditions,<sup>93</sup> the ballads display considerable variety. Osgar, for instance, is found with the epithets *fearrdha*, *fial*, *amhra*, *àluinn*, *creuchdach (caoin)*, or *àigh*. *Laoch* attracts epithets like *làn*, *lonn*, *slàn*, or *glan*. In the case of noun-epithet formulae, the same epithet can be applied to different personages, e.g. *Oisean fial*, but exclusive ownership of epithets is not found in all instances in Homer, either.<sup>94</sup> Even in a randomly chosen selection of epithet phrases like the above a bias towards a choice of alliterating words can be noticed, especially when used in the oblique cases.

The above ballad formulae draw upon the imagery of the Heroic Code. Given the structural and thematic importance of the Heroic Code in the ballads, a division of its material into a part that appears in formulae and a larger part that does not is highly undesirable. Besides, the formulaic flavour of material that technically does not constitute formulae is evident. It would appear that certain ideas, themes, or motifs are formulaic in this context, not actual phrases as in Homer, and that these ideas, themes and motifs are overwhelmingly connected to the Heroic Code. The term 'conceptual formula,' suggested by James Ross for the context of waulking songs,<sup>95</sup> would seem to be appropriate for the ballads as well, if one wishes to emphasise their formulaic aspect. I should, however, like to suggest that the material provided by the Heroic Code is more useful for the study of ballads because of the importance of its themes and its adaptability. While there is without doubt a formulaic dimension to the Heroic Code, in actual and conceptual terms, this dimension should not be overemphasised.<sup>96</sup>

## Section c: Metres and Stylistic Features

The Heroic Code is not the only instance of overlap between the ballads and the bardic tradition. Closely linked to the field of heroic imagery and its distinctive

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. pp.86-89.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. table on p.88.

<sup>95</sup> Ross, op.cit. p.4.

<sup>96</sup> MacInnes (op.cit.) is silent about the formulaic aspect of the panegyric code and the evident link with Parry's theories.

style is the field of metre. Where bardic poetry uses the strict syllabic metres of *dán díreach*, the ballads are mostly content with loose forms (*ógláchas*) of a few strict metres. There are some ballads which adhere more closely to the standards of *dán díreach* but these are likely to have begun their career as explicitly bardic pieces, for instance as an apologue to a bardic poem, as is the case for the ballad of the death of Conlaoch (BDL XXIII) by Giolla Coluim mac an Ollaimh.<sup>97</sup> Its companion piece, *Thánaig adhbhar mo thuirse*, laments the murder of Angus, son of John II Lord of the Isles, in 1490, providing an appropriate date for both poems.<sup>98</sup> Both are in *deibhidhe* and although the ballad's metre is not strict *dán díreach* its rules are applied more rigorously than in most other ballads.<sup>99</sup>

## Ballad metres

### Deibhidhe

Strict *deibhidhe* can be observed in a quatrain from *Dá urradh i n-iath Éireann* by Giolla Críost Brúilingeach.<sup>100</sup> Bold print indicates end-rhyme (*rinn* and *airdrinn* in the case of *deibhidhe*); alliterating sounds are represented by underlining, and small capitals are used to show internal rhyme (*comhardadh*).

3.     Urradh Ultach lom **lochtach**,  
           is rí cródha **Connachtach**;  
                     giolla GEAL SOICHLEACH **subhach**,  
                     is FEAR DOICHLEACH **diúltadhach**.

Strict *deibhidhe* requires heptasyllabic lines. End-rhyme of the 'x and 1+x'-type within couplets is maintained. At least two instances of alliteration per line are required and this is exceeded in striking form in lines a and c. In the final line, alliteration has to take place between the final word and the preceding stressed word. In the second couplet, at least two instances of internal rhyme are needed.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Meek in *HP*, p.135, note 10 and pp.145-146.

<sup>98</sup> The poem is printed in W.J. Watson (ed. and tr.): *Bàrdachd Albannach - Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore*, Edinburgh (SGTS) 1978 (reprint of 1937 edition); pp.82-89.

<sup>99</sup> D.E. Meek: *The Heroic Corpus in the Book of the Dean of Lismore*, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Glasgow University (1982); discussion of BDL XXIII, sections ii (1) and iv.

<sup>100</sup> Printed in Watson, op.cit. pp.46-59.

<sup>101</sup> The above analysis follows the rules for *deibhidhe* described by E. Knott: *Irish Syllabic Poetry*, Dublin 1957; pp.4-11 and 18-19.

By comparison, the opening quatrains of the Conlaoch apologue are less strictly constructed:<sup>102</sup>

1. *Do-chuala mé fad[a] ó **shoin**,  
sgéal as cosmhuil rer **gcumh[aidh]**;  
is TRÁTH dhá AITHRIS go **trom**,  
gé [a]TÁ 'na AIGNEAS **orainn**.*
2. *Clanna Rudhraigh[e] na breath **mall**,  
fa Chon[cho]bhar 's fá **Chonall**:  
fhir URLAMH ÓG[A] 'na **mhoigh**  
go h-URLAR CHÓIGIDH **Uladh**.*

The end-rhymes conform to the strict rules but with regard to the internal rhymes only qq.1cd and 2cd are satisfactory. Alliteration, although not mandatory in *ógláchas*, is well represented except in lines 1a and 2a. In lines 1c and 2d the alliterating words are separated by another stressed word which is not in accordance with the *dán díreach* rule. On the whole, the ballad adheres reasonably but not perfectly to the rules of *dán díreach* and exceeds the requirements of *ógláchas* where the *airdrinn* may be of equal length with the *rinn* or alternatively may exceed it by more than one syllable. To achieve the correct length of lines, elision is required in 1a while 2a is in danger of being hypermetric unless the <e> of *Rudhraigh[e]* is disregarded. In fairness to Giolla Coluim mac an Ollaimh, the probable author, scribal emendations to the ballad indicate the existence of variant versions at the time of BDL so that the ballad may well have been composed in strict metre originally.<sup>103</sup>

A good example of *ógláchas* of *deibhidhe* is found in the ballad of the Dearg (DF LXIII). Double underlining indicates assonance. To demonstrate the comparatively greater freedom of *ógláchas*, qq.1 and 5 have been chosen.<sup>104</sup>

1. *Aithreos caithréim in fir **móir**  
tainic anoir fo **dheaghbhúaidh**  
treinfear do bhí lán da **ghail**  
an Dearg dana mac **Droichil**.*

<sup>102</sup> As edited by Meek: HC; pp.346-352.

<sup>103</sup> Meek: HC, discussion of BDL XXIII, section ii(1).

<sup>104</sup> As printed in DF II; p.298.

5. *Do bhi días na cumang dáil  
ag coiméd in chúain chobharbháin  
Raíghne na ród MAC Finn  
's a' Cáol crodha MAC Criomhthuinn.*

End-rhyme here conforms with the *ógláchas* rules with an example for longer *airdrinn* in 5b. Internal rhyme is scarce; the potential rhyme between *mac* and *mac* in 5cd is crude and should perhaps be disregarded. The presence of assonance in 1cd and 5cd compensates to some extent for the absence of good internal rhyme. Strict alliteration is present in lines 5bc; lines 1ad and 5ad have alliterating words which are separated by stressed words.<sup>105</sup> 5b, while exhibiting good alliteration and good *ógláchas* end-rhyme with the preceding line, is hypermetric and there is no scope for elision. The line contains the vivid description *in chúain chobhairbháin* and can be interpreted as an example where metrical requirements are subordinate to striking imagery. The lesser emphasis placed on poetic artistry in the two quatrains would seem to indicate that priority was accorded to the narrative aspect of the ballad.

#### *Rannaigheacht mhór and rannaigheacht bheag*

*Deibhidhe* is the least complex of the strict metres and its appearance as a popular ballad metre is not surprising. Of the 69 ballads in DF, 43 are in *deibhidhe* or *deibhidhe*-based metres while of BDL's 27 ballads nine are in *deibhidhe* metres.<sup>106</sup> Next in popularity and in difficulty are the quatrain-based *rannaigheacht* metres. BDL has eleven texts in *rannaigheacht mhór* and DF has nine; *rannaigheacht bheag* is represented in BDL by three texts and in DF by eight.

Strict *rannaigheacht mhór* is used in *Deacair tocht ó ghalar gráidh* which has been attributed to Piaras Feiritéar as well as Cathal MacMhuirich.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>105</sup> I have doubts, however, whether *mac* in 1d and 5d should be counted as a stressed word in its present context.

<sup>106</sup> N. Ross' BDL XXVI, *Lá dá raibh i nDún Dealga* (HP; pp.180-183) is not included in Meek's edition. The poem, an apologue by Maol Sheachlainn Ó Huiginn (fl. 1440), is in strict *deibhidhe*. See N. Ross, op.cit. pp.245-246.

<sup>107</sup> P. de Brún, B. Ó Buachalla and T. Ó Concheanainn (eds.): *Nua-Dhuanaire* I, Dublin (DIAS) 1986; pp.28-29, notes pp.106-107.

1. *Deacair TOCHT# ó GHALAR gráidh,\**  
*an GALAR dom CHOR# fa chiaigh;\**  
*ní bhí an GALAR gan GUIN MBRÓIN,\**  
*GALAR nach FÓIR LUIBH ná liaigh.*

After elision in 1c, all lines are heptasyllabic; end-rhyme occurs between b and d. Asterisks indicate consonating words, a requirement which was not present in *deibhidhe*. The rules of alliteration are followed consistently. There are two internal rhymes in the first couplet and three in the second; the imperfect rhymes in the first couplet - indicated by # - are permissible. The final word of c is required to rhyme with an internal word of d. The use of *galar* as a repeated rhyming word might be criticised in normal circumstances but this poem makes the repetition into an effective stylistic feature.

*Ógláchas* of *rannagheacht mhór* allows imperfect rhymes and cuts down on the amount of required internal rhyme: while the end-rhyme between b and d is still mandatory, only the final words of a and c need to rhyme with an internal word of b and d respectively. Alliteration is largely optional. A good example of *ógláchas* of *rannagheacht mhór* is found in BDL XX:<sup>108</sup>

1. *Aithnidh domh SGÉAL beag air FIONN# -*  
*ní SGÉAL nach cuirthe an S<UIM# é> -*  
*air Mhac CUMHAILL fá math GOIL;*  
*fá CUMHAIN SOIN rém ré.*
2. *Do bha<ma[r]-n[e]> beagán SLUAIGH*  
*aig Eas RUAIDH na n-éigin mall;*  
*do-chí<mi[d]-n[e]> fá SHEÓL air LEAR*  
*curach MÓR & BEAN ann.*

The correct length of lines is not followed consistently: only in 1b is elision possible while 1d lacks a syllable, unless we expand *rém* to *ré mo*, and 2c is hypermetric. End-rhyme is satisfactory in all cases but consonance is absent. There is no alliteration. Internal rhyme, a more important feature, is better represented since 1ab, 1cd and 2cd have more than the required amount although the repeated rhyme

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<sup>108</sup> Meek: HC; pp.317-327.

of *sgéal* in 1ab may not be intended as such. Imperfect rhyme appears in 1ab. Again, the emphasis of the ballad lies clearly on telling the story.

### Rare metres

Other bardic metres are used occasionally for the ballads, as the following table of metres and their distribution indicates. Except for *deibhidhe*, the metres are quatrain-based and require different ornamentation in each case although in *ógláchas* forms this is only of marginal relevance.<sup>109</sup> One item which appears in Ross' edition of the BDL ballads (BDL XV) but not in Meek's has been left out of the table because it is not strictly a ballad. It is in quatrain-based *Séadna* ( $8^2 + 7^1$ ).

<u>DF</u>	<u>BDL</u>
<b><i>Deibhidhe</i> (<math>7^x + 7^{x+1}</math>)</b>	
Nos. I, II, III, V, VI, VII, VIII, X, XI,	Nos. II, VII, VIII, IX, XVI, XVII,
XII, XIII, XIV, XVI, XVII, XIX, XX,	XXII,
XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXXIII, XXXVII,	XXIII, XXV.
XXXVIII, XXXIX, XLI, XLII, XLIII,	
XLIV, XLVI, XLVII, XLVIII, XLIX,	
L, LIII, LIV, LVI, LIX, LX, LXI, LXII,	
LXIII, LXIV, LXV, LXVI.	
<b><i>Rannaigheacht mhór</i> (<math>7^1 + 7^1</math>)</b>	
Nos. XXIV, XXVIII, XXXI, XXXII,	Nos. I, III, IV, V, VI, XIII, XV,
XXXIV, LV, LVII, LVIII, LXVII.	XVIII,
	XIX, XX, XXVII.
<b><i>Rannaigheacht bheag</i> (<math>7^2 + 7^2</math>)</b>	
Nos. IX, XV, XXVI, XXVII, XXIX,	Nos. X, XIV, XXIV.
XXXVI, XLV, LXVIII.	

<sup>109</sup> Where Knott (op.cit.) gave no description of the metres, G. Murphy: *Early Irish Metrics*, Dublin 1961, has been referred to. Murphy describes *Rannaigheacht ghairid bheag* as *Rannaigheacht chetharchubaid gairit recomarcach* on p.55. Further information on metrics is derived from B. Ó Cuív: 'The Phonetic Basis of Classical Early Modern Rhyme' in: *Ériu* 20 (1966); pp.94-103.



***Rionnaird (6<sup>2</sup> + 6<sup>2</sup>)***

Nos. LI, LII

Nos. XI, XXI.

***Leathrannaigheacht mhór (5<sup>2</sup> + 5<sup>2</sup>)***

No. XXV

No. XXVI

***Ae fhreislighe (7<sup>3</sup> + 7<sup>2</sup>)***

Nos. IV, XVIII, XXX, XXXV.

None.

***Rionnaird agus cró cumaisg idir rionnaird is leath-rannaigheacht (6<sup>2</sup> + 5<sup>1</sup>)***

No. LXIX.

None.

***Rannaigheacht ghairid bheag (3<sup>2</sup> + 7<sup>2</sup> + 7<sup>2</sup> + 7<sup>2</sup>)***

No. XL.

None.

***Trian rannaigheachta móire (4<sup>1</sup> + 4<sup>1</sup>)***

None.

No. XII.

None of the DF ballads in rare metres belong to the texts that appear frequently in later manuscripts; at any rate, no extant texts are listed in the RIA catalogues. There are, however, DF ballads in the common metres as well which appear rarely or not at all in later tradition. Rare metres are not a deciding factor in the acceptance of ballads into later tradition as the BDL examples indicate. BDL XII, *Ardaigheach Goll*, and BDL XI, *Innis dúinn, a Phádrúig*, are well attested in Scotland and Ireland. BDL XXI, *Innis dúinn, a Fhearghuis*, survives in a few examples in Scotland and BDL XXVI, *Sé lá gus andé*, is represented by occasional appearances in Irish and Scottish tradition.<sup>110</sup>

## **Stylistic features**

### The cheville

Other stylistic features exist apart from the aural artistry of alliteration and rhyme. There is overlap between metrical requirements and some of these features. The most obvious stylistic feature in this context is the cheville, a syntactically

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<sup>110</sup> BDL XI and XXI belong to the *Cath Gabhra* family and are discussed in detail in chapter 5, sections b and c, and chapter 6, sections a and b.

independent, often exclamatory, phrase that gives a line of verse its required length. Chevilles are usually found at the end of lines and are important in providing rhyming words. The following selection of chevilles, highlighted in bold print, comes from the BDL version of *Eas Ruaidh*.<sup>111</sup> The metre is *ógláchas* of *rannaigheacht mhór*.

q.30cd *agus fógrais, **borb an TAOM**,  
cómhrag air an C[H]AOGAID laoch.*

q.39cd *Mac Morn[a], **fá deighfhios LIOM**,  
'gá leigheas ag FIONN na <fleadh.>*

q.41ab *Flann mac Morn[a], **cruaidh an CÁS**,  
fhuair BÁS, **fá mór an t-ÉACHT**; (end-rhyme with *CHRÉACHT* in d)*

Chevilles play an unusually prominent role in DF XLVIII, *Deargrúathar cloinne Morna*, a ballad in *ógláchas* of *deibhidhe* of which a larger version is extant in the Book of Leinster (LL).<sup>112</sup> There are 21 instances of chevilles spread throughout the DF ballad's 39 quatrains although four of them appear twice and one is found three times. This establishes the formulaic character of the cheville as such repetition occurs throughout the ballads and in bardic poetry. The following selection illustrates their use in this ballad.

10cd *mar ar fhagoibh Caoínce **CIATH**  
mo macsa féin **forrach NÍADH**.*<sup>113</sup>

q.39 *Seisior fiche ar sé **CHÉD**  
ar chóig mhíle **mor in BÉD**  
do cloinn Bhaoíscne **mór in modh**<sup>114</sup>  
do thuít ar in deargruatar.*

<sup>111</sup> Meek: *HC*, pp.317-327.

<sup>112</sup> *DF* II, pp.142-153 and *DF* III, pp. 109-111. The Book of Leinster text is printed in R.I Best and M.A. O' Brien (eds.): *The Book of Leinster* vol IV; Dublin (DIAS) 1965; pp.978-988.<sup>113</sup> This is a six-line unit. The cheville occurs again in q.34b.

<sup>114</sup> There is no proper end-rhyme in this couplet. Cheville repeated in qq.38b and 26c.

The cheville is a useful device for composition and for mnemonic purposes as it is usually involved in rhyme but does not depend on fitting into the syntactical framework. From the above examples it is clear that the cheville can fulfil two functions within a text. It reinforces the mood of the ballad (e.g. *cruaidh an cás*) or it comments on certain aspects of the text, often in the voice of the narrator (e.g. *fá deighfhios liom*). Chevilles often draw upon the motifs of the Heroic Code (e.g. *fá mór an t-éacht, mór in modh*); this aspect may lead to overlap with some of the different types of epithet described above. One such ambiguous instance is found in BDL I, <Atá fán> *tulaigh so tuaidh*:<sup>115</sup>

q.3cd *Clann Morn[a] gé math na fir,*  
*nochar chuir sé sin <am> bríogh.*

*Gé math na fir* can be interpreted as an heroic epithet, or as a panegyric cheville which reinforces the mood of the quatrain; the conjunction *gé* serves to provide a syntactic connection which is not mandatory for the cheville.

#### Duplication and triplication

Duplication and triplication are frequently used stylistic devices. Doublets are usually accommodated within a line of poetry while triplets often extend over a couplet or an entire quatrain. Alliteration plays an important role in linking the constituent parts of a doublet or triplet; another linking device is provided by parallel structure within a quatrain. There is also overlap with parallel structuring which is a stylistic device in its own right. Triplets and couplets are made up of equivalent or near-equivalent constituents; alternatively, they contain cumulative elements. In most instances, one of the constituents of a doublet or triplet would have been sufficient to make the point; the intention of the stylistic device is thus to add detail or place an emphasis while also time filling a line. The following examples of duplication and triplication are found in DF LXII, *Lá do bhí sealg Shléibhe Guilleann*, an episodic adventure ballad in *ógláchas* of *deibhidhe*.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Meek: HC, p.207.

<sup>116</sup> DF II, pp.248-297.

Equivalent doublets (in bold print):

q.21ab *Da mbeith sloigh dhomhain UILE*  
*ar mh'ineac 's ar mh'IMPIDHE.*

q.41cd *ar cheasta fhaophar mo LOINN*  
*is ar eagla mo comloinn.*

Cumulative doublets:

q.32 *Do-beirim do shlansa fuim*  
*a Osgair ge maith do clu*  
*7 slan chloinne th'ATHOR*  
*a mhic Oisín ARDFHLATHA.*

q.121cd *gan tacha cuirme no CEÓIL*  
*gan díth muirne nó COMHÓIL.*

Most of the above examples are straightforward although sometimes the simple doublet structure is capable of considerable sophistication. In q.41cd the doublets are extended by following genitives while q.121cd exhibits three interconnected doublets. In q.32 the doublets extend over both couplets of the quatrain and are followed by a line of direct address to Osgar. The epithetic construction of these two lines is worth noting.

Equivalent triplets:

q.29cd *créd do-bheir tu da CHÁINEADH*  
*da aithis no da IMDEARGADH.*<sup>117</sup>

q.64 *Le fios do ghabhus tú NEART*  
*& re feabhus T'INNTLEAHT*  
*& re cognam do MHÉR*  
*ag iarraidh fheasa gach AOÍNSGÉL.*

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<sup>117</sup> This triplet is repeated in q.35cd after adjusting it to the 1st person singular in an answer to this quatrain.

Cumulative triplets:

q.26cd *rachad fein ar son M'ATHOR*  
*ar mo son fein 's mo SEANATHOR.*

q.118 *Fa búan ar freasdal do MHIODH*  
*fa mor ar meisge o CHORNAIBH*  
*fa maith ar n-oirfideadh BHINN*  
*a n-onóir Fhinn mic CUMHAILL.*

Some triplets are again quite straightforward although qq.64 and 118 demonstrate how triplication may serve as a device for building up tension before a final 'punchline.' Q.64, incidentally, could with equal justification be classified as cumulative. As in the case of stylistic features discussed above, much of the material contained in doublets or triplets is connected to the imagery of the Heroic Code.

#### Repetition, lists, and parallel structure

These are closely connected stylistic devices. Repetition can have a balancing function, as in the case of DF LXII, qq.29cd (quoted above) and 35cd, where the repeated couplets frame a passage of dialogue. Repetition is sometimes used to achieve a dynamic effect as in the following conversation between Cormac mac Airt and the Dearg in DF LXIII:<sup>118</sup>

q.33cd *beacht do thurais go TEAMRAIGH*  
*innis a laóich MOIRMHEANMNAIGH.*

q.34 *Beacht mo thuraisi DUIT*  
*a mic Airt curata CORMAIC*  
*geilleadh Eirionn dob áil LIOM*  
*no fras bheimionn 'na TIMCIOLL.*

q.35ab *Geilleadh Eirionn tar MUIR*  
*ge minic do shirdís TRÉINFHIR*

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<sup>118</sup> DF II, pp.298-317.

In numerous instances, repetition has developed into parallel structure. An example of this is found in BDL IX where the couplet *Do-rinneas-sa beódha[cht] trá/ do-rinneas fógra fhoghla* introduces qq.4-9 in a sequence describing Caoilte's destructive progress through Ireland.<sup>119</sup> The same ballad exhibits a different kind of parallel structure in which the pattern 'two + animal + place-name' is sustained in nearly every line in a lengthy passage describing the animals from every part of Ireland that Caoilte gathered for Cormac (qq.30-50). This passage also demonstrates how parallel structure is used in lists. In *Deargruathar Cloinne Morna* (DF XVIII), a substantial part of the ballad is taken up by lists, often showing parallel structure in the form of the pattern 'Ro (or Do) marbhsat (or marbhadar) + hero's name + (optional) place-name' as in the following example:

q.37    *Ro marpatar Lughaidh LONN*  
           *ro marpsat Cairche CROM*  
               *ro loiscseat ced cuaine CON*  
               *a tTulaigh úaine ÁRCHON.*

q.38    *Tulach Árchon ó ár CHON*  
           *ainm na tulach mór in MODH*  
               *Tulach Airde a ainm ROIMHE*  
               *ó aird con Mic FíODHBÁIDHE.*

Q.37 is the final quatrain of a list of slain warriors beginning in q.31 which follows the above pattern; q.38 contains an unconnected reference to an unspecified event at *Tulach Árchon* which involved the killing of hounds. The *Tulach Árchon* episode is relevant because it draws attention to its importance by the immediate repetition of the place-name in q.38a. The piece of *dindshenchas* in this quatrain does not appear to be corroborated by 'mainstream' *dindshenchas*.<sup>120</sup>

While repetition and, to some extent, parallel structure can be used to further plot development this is not a criterion that can be applied to the function of lists. Lists are static in terms of ballad plot; instead, they serve to highlight heroic achievement, as in the case of Caoilte's collection of creatures or the list of victims of clann Morna. Such passages give an opportunity to show off a reciter's power of

<sup>119</sup> Meek: HC, pp.240-257.

<sup>120</sup> Neither *Tulach Árchon* nor *Tulach Airde* are listed in the relevant index of E. Gwynn (ed. and tr.): *The Metrical Dindshenchas* vol.5; Dublin (DIAS) 1991 (reprint of RIA Todd Lecture Series vol.XII, 1935).



memory, or a reciter's or composer's knowledge and erudition as indicated by the above *dindshenchas* example.

### Simile and metaphor

These stylistic devices are relatively rare in the ballads. Similes are rarely developed in any detail and usually draw on heroic imagery, as in the following example from BDL XXI, *Innis dúinne, a Fhearghuis* in which Fearghus File describes Osgar's valour in a cluster of similes.<sup>121</sup>

- q.8    *Ni luaith[e] eas <abhann>*  
          *ná seabhac ré ealtaibh,*  
          *ná ríoghbbhuinne srotha*  
          *ná Osgar 'san gcath soin.*
- q.9    *Bhí sé má dheireadh*  
          *mar bhile ré tréan ghaoith,*  
          *ná mar chrann bhuas fhiodhbhaidh*  
          *'s a bhiodhbh[aidh] ga[ch]a n-aontaoibh.*

The images of swiftness and strength are taken from the context of nature but the last line of each quatrain returns to the subject of the ballad, Osgar's valour in the battle of Gabhair.

Metaphors occur infrequently in the ballads, even in a text that is exclusively concerned with heroic praise, for instance BDL XII, *Ard aigne Ghuill*.<sup>122</sup> Two examples of metaphor are found here, one in q.19a, *Léomhan air ágh*, and another in q.23d, *onchú air goil*. Another instance occurs in BDL XIII, *Gleann Síodh an gleann so rém thaoibh*, where Diarmaid is described in a passage of elegy and praise as *Seabhac súlghorm Eas[a] Ruaidh* (q.21a).<sup>123</sup> These examples draw on imagery connected with nature, more specifically heroic animals.

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<sup>121</sup> Meek: HC, pp.328-331.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. pp.273-281.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. pp.282-288.

## Section d: Orality in the Ballads

### Stylistic devices and the oral context

The stylistic devices discussed above share a strong link with the imagery of the Heroic Code which in turn has a significant formulaic dimension. They also contain a formulaic element of their own, as is evident from the examples quoted, and are commonly regarded as hallmarks of oral poetry and oral composition.<sup>124</sup> It is often asserted that oral poetry only flourishes in a non-literate environment, particularly by those who subscribe to the theory of oral-formulaic composition.<sup>125</sup> The first problem that arises in this context is how to explain the presence of oral elements in a genre with clearly literate connections; the second problem is whether it is appropriate to apply the oral-formulaic theory to the ballads.

It has already been demonstrated that the ballads are linked to the learned and literate bardic context on a formal level and that several ballads originated in an explicitly bardic environment. The ballads from early manuscript sources, the Book of Leinster (LL), BDL, and DF, are connected to a literate background by virtue of being found in a written source. In two miscellaneous manuscripts, LL and BDL, the ballad texts appear in conjunction with texts that are the product of a learned environment. The LL ballads are embedded in a long sequence of *dindshenchas* poems, while the BDL corpus of ballads is complemented by an important body of bardic poetry from the Classical period up to the compilers' own time.<sup>126</sup> It is likely that the compilers of BDL derived their material from manuscript sources which, however, may go back to fairly recent oral sources;<sup>127</sup> it is obvious that certain of the BDL ballads exhibit a liveliness and dynamism also present in the best ballad texts of the 18th and 19th century, some of which appear to have a similar pedigree of coming from a sequence of manuscripts that were recently derived from oral tradition. What the BDL example shows is that the *literati* of the time considered the ballads in the same class as bardic poetry proper.

DF falls into a slightly different category. Whether any of the source manuscripts had recent oral antecedents is difficult to establish although the DF

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<sup>124</sup> K. O' Nolan: 'Homer and the Irish Hero Tale' in: *Studia Hibernica* 8 (1968), pp.15-18.

<sup>125</sup> Compare A.B. Lord: *The Singer of Tales*; Cambridge (Mass.)/ London 1960, p.20. D. Buchan (*The Ballad and the Folk*; London/ Boston 1972; p.64), on the other hand, concedes the possibility that literate persons were able to compose in an oral manner in certain circumstances.

<sup>126</sup> For the LL ballads, see Best and O' Brien: *The Book of Leinster* vol.IV; pp.978-988 and 994-1005. For the BDL texts see D.E. Meek: 'The Gaelic Ballads of Medieval Scotland' in: *TGSI* 55 (1986-1988); p.51.

<sup>127</sup> Meek: *HC*; p.18.

material on the whole seems to display fewer characteristics than BDL that point to a close link with oral tradition. Apart from the ballads, DF also contains incomplete versions of the *Agallamh na Seanórach* and of a story about Fionn and Magnus, as well as a poem unconnected to the Fionn-context; DF thus represents a specialist compilation of a type which is abundantly in evidence in later Irish scribal tradition.

While a strong link with a literate context is evident for these three chance survivals of the early period, it is also clear that a parallel oral environment plays a role at least in the Scottish example of BDL. There are, however, indications that oral and literate contexts were not as clearly demarcated, mutually exclusive, concepts to the intellectual of Classical Common Gaelic times as they are to *literati* of the late 20th century, with our perceptions derived predominantly from written literature and the precepts laid down by associated literary criticism.

Despite the fact that all extant examples of bardic poetry necessarily have survived in the shape of manuscripts, it is known that they existed in an original environment of recitation, and that the evidence of the written sources represents only a small sample of the material composed throughout the Classical period.<sup>128</sup> The artistry of metre and sound of bardic poetry is best appreciated in listening and thus the poet's training emphasised this oral and aural aspect of poetic composition in theory and practice. Accounts of the method of bardic composition such as Martin Martin's or that contained in the Clanrickarde Memoirs - regardless of whether the details are accurate - indicate that the poets were trained to compose orally, that is without the aid of pen and paper rather than in the sense of oral-formulaic composition.<sup>129</sup> This preoccupation of the *literati* with their specialist oral context, while it appears to be less pronounced in most non-ballad bardic poetry, is evident in the stylistic features of the ballads although these stylistic features do not derive exclusively from the Classical context. The ballads also exhibit significant links with vernacular literature, which was oral by definition, in terms of lesser adherence to the Classical language than in bardic poetry. It is likely that the use of oral stylistic features in the ballads is also at least partially derived from vernacular examples.<sup>130</sup> Significantly, the composers of the ballads, whether they were trained bards or educated individuals with a poetic inclination, had a sufficient understanding of the requirements of composition for oral performance and - as tradition proves - oral transmission to blend Classical and vernacular features into a highly successful

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<sup>128</sup> J. Carney: 'Society and the Bardic Poet' in: *Studies* LXIII (1973); pp.237-238.

<sup>129</sup> M. Martin: *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland circa 1695*; Edinburgh 1994 (reprint of 1934 edition); pp.176-177; and O. Bergin: *Irish Bardic Poetry*; Dublin (DIAS) 1970; pp.5-8.

<sup>130</sup> See also Meek: 'Gaelic Ballads;' p.49.

literary genre. The aristocratic metres, subject matter, and, to some extent, language provided the ballads with social prestige while vernacular stylistic features that partially overlapped with corresponding bardic ones ensured instant familiarity and intelligibility. While the vernacular element gave scope for textual variation to the ballads, the bardic element provided a stabilising counterbalance. Therefore, oral-formulaic composition is highly unlikely to have played a significant role in the genesis or transmission of the ballads.

### **Conceptual, formal, and medial orality**

The strong oral dimension particularly in performance of all poetic genres in the Irish and Scottish literary tradition is well attested and the ballads form no exception.<sup>131</sup> Different aspects of orality are among the most striking features of the ballad genre and play a prominent role in other texts with a Fionn-association.<sup>132</sup>

It is tempting to speculate that Fionn-material in general did not originate in the context of the learned *file* with his historical, literary and artistic preoccupations but within the less prestigious area of folk literature in which an oral environment can be assumed as natural and appropriate, perhaps with an admixture of ideas and techniques derived and assimilated from bardic literature.<sup>133</sup> This originally oral vernacular environment is difficult to demonstrate conclusively since all extant early texts are firmly connected with the learned context.<sup>134</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest that the impression of a steady increase of Fionn-texts in quantity and popularity that begins in the Old Irish period and gathers momentum throughout the Early Modern Irish period is not exclusively the result of chance survival but reflects a gradual absorption of more and more Fionn-material from an oral environment into the learned context of professional poets and scholars.

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<sup>131</sup> For a potential Irish example of oral input see this chapter, section d, sub-section: Oral input in the scribal environment?.

<sup>132</sup> A planned section on the role of orality in the *Acallam na Senórach* had to be abandoned for reasons of space.

<sup>133</sup> J.F. Nagy: *The Wisdom of the Outlaw*, pp.2-4. G. Murphy (*DF III*, pp.xiii-lxx) adduces evidence from oral and literary texts to argue the parallel existence of Fionn-traditions in folk and bardic contexts from a very early period onwards. His theory, however, does not appear to make much use of the mutual contact or influence that is likely to have taken place over the period of time he discusses. H. Roe: '*Acallamh na Senórach*: The Confluence of Lay and Clerical Traditions' in: C.J. Byrne (et al. eds.): *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples* (Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies); Halifax 1992; pp. 331-346; states on p.332 that Fionn-material originated in an oral context but does not produce any evidence.

<sup>134</sup> As is evident from Meyer's list of relevant texts dating from the seventh to the fourteenth century in *Fianaigeacht*, pp.xvi-xxxi.

Conceptual orality, the presentation of a text as if it were an actual oral text, is a prominent feature of the ballads, for instance in ballads which are set in the framework of a dialogue between Patrick and Oisín.<sup>135</sup> In some ballads, this framework is incomplete or merely implied while a few ballads consist only of dialogue between Patrick and Oisín.<sup>136</sup> There are occasional instances where Caoilte is Patrick's dialogue partner.<sup>137</sup> At least one text displays a framework of question and answer involving Oisín and Caoilte, with Caoilte as the narrator and Oisín as the questioner.<sup>138</sup> Caoilte as sole narrator is found occasionally but gradually drops out of the tradition in his role as narrator of ballads.<sup>139</sup>

Ballads with a dialogue frame provide a setting reminiscent of an actual storytelling or reciting session while the ballad within the frame represents the item that is told or recited. A different aspect of conceptual orality is present in ballads that consist of dialogue only. Here, the audience listens to events as they unfold so that dialogue here is a means of furthering the plot.<sup>140</sup> Dialogues within ballads usually fulfil the same function in the sense of conveying important information between dialogue partners as well as to the audience. Ballads are thus presented as an oral genre in the conceptual sense and contain features in their construction that are consistent with an intended oral mode of performance.<sup>141</sup> Such features can be described as exhibiting formal orality. Dialogue passages, while conceptually oral, also have features that are important in providing clarity in a context of actual oral performance; in other words, features that display formal orality. The following passage from the *Dearg* (DF LXIII) involves the *Dearg* himself, Fionn's son Raighne, and Caol Crodha mac Criomhthainn:<sup>142</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Explicit dialogue frames occur in BDL VI, *Lá dhá dheachaidh sé dhá chill*, and in DF LIX, *La da rabhamar a nDún Bó*. See Meek: *HC*, pp.220-230 and *DF* II, pp.222-233 respectively. BDL IV, *Is fada a-nocht a-nOil Finn*, is an example of an incomplete Patrick-Oisín frame since Oisín only identifies himself in the penultimate quatrain and addresses Patrick in the last one. See Meek: *HC*, pp.212-214.

<sup>136</sup> For instance BDL XI, *Innis dúinn, a Phádraig*, and DF LVII, *A Oisín as fada do shúan*, both well attested in Scottish and Irish tradition. See Meek: *HC*, pp.264-272 and *DF* II, pp.203-215 respectively.

<sup>137</sup> In DF LX, *In ccúala tú Fíana Finn*, although Patrick is addressed by Caoilte, there are no quatrains in which the saint appears as the speaker so that the dialogue structure is only implicit. See *DF* II, pp.234-239.

<sup>138</sup> DF VIII, *Ceisd agam ort a Chaoilte*, an incomplete text. See *DF* I, pp.21-22.

<sup>139</sup> In BDL IX, *Theighim toisg a dh'fhosgladh Finn* and in a later version of the same ballad in DF VII, *Maidhim in mhaidin fa ghlonn*. See Meek: *HC*, pp.240-257 and *DF* I, pp.19-21 respectively.

<sup>140</sup> For instance in BDL II, *A Gharaidh, triallmaid go Fionn*. See Meek: *HC*, pp.209-210.

<sup>141</sup> As discussed in this chapter, section c, sub-section: Stylistic features.

<sup>142</sup> *DF* II, pp.300-302.

13. *Innis sgéla dhuinn a fhir mhoir*  
*oruinn tainic coiméd in chúain*  
***dha mac righ go sárbhúaidh sinn***  
*d'Fhíanuibh lánuaisle Eirinn*
  
14. *Asan ccrich o ttanac anois*  
*nirb iomdha neach um ainbfius*  
***misi in Dearg mac rígh na fFionn***  
*ag iarraidh airdrioghdacht Eirionn*
  
15. ***Do chan Raíghne an aignidh mhir***  
*go dian risin Dearg mac Droichil*  
*ní ghébha tusa **a laoích láin***  
*uaauim no geilleadh ffear fFáil*
  
16. *Acht ge borb sibhsi **a dhías láoch***  
*canus formad & fioch*  
*cía do bhacfadh diom a gabháil*  
*a glacadh no a hiongabháil*
  
17. *Da n-áirmhinn duitsi gach fear*  
***a Dheirg móir mhic an ardflath***  
*iomdha láoch aderadh ann*  
*go ngébhadh ré do chomhlann*
  
18. *Cait a ffuil einneach dhiobh sin*  
***do raidh an Dearg mac Droichil***  
*gó ffeachmaois ré chéile*  
*ar ffíoch is ar n-aimhréidhe*
  
19. *Do briathra ge borb linn*  
***bar Cáol crodha mac Criomhthuinn***  
*ag sud misi dot chlaoí anois*  
***a laoíchúd** tainic thairis*

This is the longest dialogue passage in this ballad and since it involves three participants it has to contain clear indicators as to who is speaking. Each quatrain



contains only one speaker who either is identified or addresses his dialogue partner or partners. Identification by address occurs in qq.13a, (15b), 16a, 17a, and 19d; self-identification is found in qq.13cd and 14c; and identification by narratorial device ('said X') is present in qq.15ab, 18b, and 19b. While such narratorial devices intrude somewhat into the carefully constructed framework of conceptual orality they are nevertheless essential for audience and reciter alike to keep track of plot development. There is at least one instance of identification in each quatrain of the dialogue sequence and most of the identifications take up the entire line and are highly formulaic. These patterns of identification are found in abundance throughout the ballads and serve to illustrate the suggestion that the ballads were composed specifically with oral performance in mind. Such aspects of formal orality are also important when considering the pointers to actual oral performance or transmission.<sup>143</sup>

There is, of course, scope for overlap between conceptual, formal, and medial orality: a medially oral text necessarily contains both formally and conceptually oral traits but a conceptually oral text, while likely to display formally oral characteristics, does not have to be medially oral as the large corpus of texts from manuscript tradition in Ireland and Scotland indicates.<sup>144</sup>

### **Oral input in the scribal environment?**

The Irish textual tradition does not appear to furnish clear evidence for oral input. Besides textual differences that are obviously the result of scribal errors, there are also differences that cannot be explained in this way. It would be rash, however, to attribute such differences immediately to influence from an oral context. The scribes were learned men, often poets as well, and they were very aware of the sound of the poetry in their manuscripts which were, after all, being read aloud. As guardians of literature as well as competent judges of it, scribes may have seen it as their duty to improve on their texts by changing phrases, removing passages, or adding sequences.

Additional material can blend into a ballad successfully, as in the case of certain versions of *Innis dúinn*, a *Oisín* which include a passage from *Éirigh a*

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<sup>143</sup> See chapter 3, sections c and d.

<sup>144</sup> For the distinction between conceptual and medial orality, see W. Raible: 'Orality and Literacy. On Their Medial and Conceptual Aspects' in: D. Scheunemann (ed.): *Orality, Literacy, and Modern Media*; Columbia 1996; pp.17-26.

*Osgair fhéil*.<sup>145</sup> Other examples are less successful, for example in *Lá dá raibh Fionn ag ól* (BDL VII and DF LXV) which exists in a short recension, of 17 to 21 quatrains, and a long one, of usually 46 quatrains. All extant versions of the long recension are in nineteenth century manuscripts but this may not reflect the situation of origin and transmission accurately. Some long versions are part of a long compilation of several ballads.<sup>146</sup> This is likely to have developed in a scribal situation because of its length and relative textual stability. The long texts incorporate sequences of new quatrains which usually expand single quatrains or existing dialogue sections of the short recension into long dialogues, as the following examples from RIA 23 A 23 (short recension), written by Seán Ó Dreada in 1835, and RIA 23 K 18 (long recension), written by Uilliam Ó Haodha in the early nineteenth century, indicate:

RIA 23 A 23

8. *Tabhair an brat dam mhnaoi féin*  
*Do ráidh Conán Maol gan chéill*  
*Go bhfeasam an cómhraídh fíora*  
*Do chansad na mná ó chianaibh*
9. *Glacfadsa an brat ó Chonán*  
*Má's áil leat léigíon do'd t'iomrádh*  
*'Sas mór do ghoilleas oram féin*  
*A ndéanas tú dam aimhréir*

RIA 23 K 18

8. *Tabhair an brat dom mhnaoi féin*  
*Ar Conán Maol a ínghin óig*  
*Nó go bfeasam an briathar mear*  
*Tug na mná ar mhaithe leó*
9. *Glacadsa an brat a Chonáin*  
*Ar an bhean dob áille gnúis*  
*Gé mór ghoilleas orm féin*  
*A ndéinín tú dam mhíréir gan chúis*
10. *Gabhas bean Chonáin gan chéil*  
*An brat uimpe féin go dlúith*  
*An tan fúair an brat a casa*  
*Gan fhois don fhear mheata dfúig*
11. *A bhean ar Conán go borb*  
*Créad an doilg duit más fíor*  
*Na bríathra grod ó chiannaibh*  
*An brat ar íasacht thámhus lead chlíd*

<sup>145</sup> See chapter 4, section c, sub-section: Core texts and ancillary texts (Links between *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil*).

<sup>146</sup> See Appendix, Introduction, section a, sub-section: Irish manuscript sources.

12. *Do ghabhasa an brat róimhe seo*  
*A Chonáin cosg do bhéal leamh*  
*Is brígh ar bith ní geilltuir liom*  
*Do bheith ann súd do mhnaoi ná dfear*

13. *Ná bí dá lúadh a bhean ar Conán*  
*Gaibh an brat áluinn chúghad*  
*Nó go bfeasad an fíor an glór*  
*Mar aon leó do thaithne liom*

14. *Gabhas an bhean an brat a rís*  
*A Chonáin ar sí do chrith ghlór*  
*Ní bfuil acht neimhnídh san mbrat*  
*Cuirim anaith dhuit gan ghó*

10. *Glacas bean Chonáin an brat*  
*Is gabhas uimpe é go prap*  
*Do gheasaibh brúit na neang cheart*  
*Gur léig leis í an aoinfheacht*

15. *Do ghaibh bean Conáin Mhaoil*  
*An brat fíor uimpe go mear*  
*Ba gharaid do chuadh a chuaird*  
*Ba dhoilbh dá lúadh an bean*

11. *Mar chonairc Conán Maol an brat*  
*Ag filleadh fá na taobh deas*  
*Tógbas a chraoiseach go prap*  
*Agos marbhas an inghean as*

16. *An tan do chonnairc Conan Maol*  
*An brat fá na taobh a casa*  
*Nochtas a chloidhiomh le nimh*  
*An inghin nar ghlic gur mharbh*

The new quatrains are less competently constructed than the original ones. They are composed in a metre based on *rannaigheacht mhór*, as opposed to the *deibhidhe*-based metre of the short recension; q.9d (long recension) even adds *gan chúis* to achieve *rannaigheacht*-style rhyme. It is evident from the relative absence of poetic decoration, such as alliteration and, in some instances, internal rhyme, that the new material in the long recension belongs to a post-bardic period of composition although a basic understanding of classical metres was still considered necessary for the appreciation of poetry in the classical language. Composition in classical metres, however, was not widely practised in the eighteenth century.<sup>147</sup> It is likely that the long recension's new quatrains were created towards the end of the century. The

<sup>147</sup> D. Corkery: *The Hidden Ireland*; Dublin 1941 (third impression), p.101.

expansion also fails to add any new material to the plot. It is detrimental to the dramatic compactness of the short texts but no doubt the humorous treatment of the dialogues would have raised a chuckle among the gathered listeners.

Verbal differences in the shared quatrains are difficult to evaluate. The above example shows that some changes have taken place between the short recension and the long one. If these changes came about in an oral environment, the text appears to have returned to the scribal environment fairly quickly because there is a high degree of agreement between versions within the long recension. This and the presence of the long recension in the long compilation of ballads, which is occasionally divided into 'books' (e.g. in RIA 23 O 7), argues in favour of its origin and transmission in a scribal context.. If the evidence of the RIA texts is a reliable indicator, the short recension was the more popular of the two.

### **Prose and the oral context**

Some links exist between Scottish folktales about Fionn and the *Fian* and the ballads. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when folktales began to be collected systematically, texts with a strong bias towards narrative and heroic adventure predominated in the Scottish corpus of ballads. The pioneering collection of folktales, J.F. Campbell's Popular Tales of the West Highlands, first published in 1862, contains a number of such ballads alongside prose items.<sup>148</sup> It would be easy to dismiss this as the result of Campbell's editorial decision to present material which belongs to the context of Fionn and the Fian in a logical manner. It is significant, however, that Campbell chose to include these ballads in a work expressly dedicated to folktales. It is equally significant that Campbell and his collaborators got the ballads along with the tales when their main objective would have been the acquisition of prose material. This implies that in the minds of the reciters who provided the material for PTWH, ballads and tales alike were considered to belong to the genre of *fiannaíocht*, despite the absence of the term in Scottish tradition; and that the narrative aspect of the ballads would appear to take precedence over the ballads' status as poetry. Moreover, the relative elaboration of the poetic decoration of some early texts had become progressively attenuated during successive centuries of predominantly oral transmission;<sup>149</sup> while such a development is only to be expected in an oral environment the strong narrative dimension may be seen as a

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<sup>148</sup> Prose and ballad texts are scattered throughout volume 3 of PTWH.

<sup>149</sup> See this chapter, section c, sub-section: Ballad metres.

further contributory factor to the decline of metrical sophistication - the plot was more important than the metre or its decorations.<sup>150</sup>

### Introductions and 'arguments'

Later Scottish tradition in particular shows examples of prose passages that attach themselves to ballads. These are often associated with an oral context and provide material that gives the background to a ballad or explains matters that are not immediately obvious from the text itself. English 'arguments' or summaries are prefixed to many ballads, for instance the Gaelic texts in Kennedy's collections. These 'arguments' are strongly influenced in their style by James Macpherson's writings, to the extent of naming Fingal in the 'arguments' where Fionn subsequently features in the ballad. More important, however, is the fact that quite often Kennedy introduces information into his 'arguments' which is derived from current oral tradition but not present in the ballad, as in the case of his 'argument' to the Diarmaid-ballad *S moch a ghoiras a Chórr* in his first collection where he mentions material not present in the ballad such as Diarmaid's love-spot.<sup>151</sup>

Prose introductions to ballads were occasionally given by nineteenth-century reciters as well. A fragmentary text of a Scottish *Cath Gabhra* ballad collected by Alexander Carmichael in 1869 from the South Uist reciter Patrick Smith and extant in the Carmichael-Watson collection (C.-W.7) contains an introduction which provides the background to the ballad fragment.<sup>152</sup> This is clearly a late development since it uses the folktale motif of death by a unique deadly weapon (Z312.)<sup>153</sup> which is not present in the ballad but at the same time serves as a plausible explanation for the enmity between Osgar and Cairbre. The introduction also contains information typical of the Scottish Variant texts.

Some Irish scribes give long titles to their texts which fulfil a similar function to Kennedy's 'arguments.' In the unpublished manuscript RIA F VI 2, dated 1813, the Cork scribe Micheál Óg Ó Longáin gives the title *Cómhrac na Féinne 7 mhic Rígh na Sorcha mar gheall air inghión Rígh thíre fá thiúinn. sonn. Oisín cct.* to his version of BDL XX which here begins *Atá sgéal beag agam air Fhíonn.* In the same

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<sup>150</sup> See also chapter 3, section c, sub-section: dynamics of metre.

<sup>151</sup> *LF*, p.153.

<sup>152</sup> Introduction and ballad text are given in the Appendix, Part 2, Scottish Texts: section c: Short and Fragmentary Texts.

<sup>153</sup> T.P. Cross: *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*; Bloomington (Indiana University) 1969 (reprint); p.536.

manuscript, Ó Longáin entitles the *Cath Gabhra* ballad *Mór anocht mo chúmha féin* as follows:

*Aig seo an duain deaghnach do rin Oisín mac Fínn a bhfiaghnuisi Phádraig mar a ttugann tuarasgabháil chatha Gabhra dho ionnar thuit a mhac Osgar. Tugadh an cath so A.D. 285.*

This outlines the ballad's Oisín-Patrick setting and the crucial event at the battle, Osgar's death; additional information not derived from the ballad includes the supposed date of the battle and the assertion that this was the last poem Oisín composed. A slightly different introduction to a version of the same poem is found in the unpublished manuscript RIA 23 D 30 by David Mullan, dated 1721-1722: *Ag so sios an Tuaraisg do bhear Oisín mac Finn air chath Ghabhra do Phadruig ionar thuit a mhac miolata moraiqeantach .i. Osgar mac Oisín*. Here, the title adds a brief sequence in praise of Osgar. In the above instances, the titles of, or introductions to, the ballads can be paralleled in other manuscripts in an identical or similar form.

#### Ballad material in prose texts

A final significant link between ballad and folktale is found in a development in evidence in later Scottish tradition. A number of folktales have been collected which contain verse passages of varying length that were taken from the ballads. One such example is the story of Diarmaid and Grainne collected in 1859 in Islay by Hector MacLean from Alexander Macalister.<sup>154</sup> Only some passages are relevant for the present purpose. After Diarmaid has killed the giant Ciofach, Grainne, who had been living with the giant, follows Diarmaid in order to rejoin him. They converse in a verse sequence which begins '*S moch a ghoireas a chorr*' and corresponds to Kennedy's qq.1 and 2 of the same ballad but with a number of differences such as would be expected in a context of oral transmission. Their conversation continues after these two quatrains but the rest of the passage does not appear to belong to any extant Diarmaid-ballad. The next relevant episode is the boar-hunt where sequences from the ballad of Diarmaid's death are interspersed. Most of them can be identified by comparison with Gillies' eighteenth-century version.<sup>155</sup> Grainne's warning of Fionn's treachery is related to Gillies q.5ab and in the incident of measuring the boar

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<sup>154</sup> PTWH 3, pp.49-59. Several other instances of the combination of prose tales with ballad material are found in J.G. Campbell: *The Fians*.

<sup>155</sup> LF, pp.162-163.



versions of Gillies qq.15cd, 17a, and 18ab occur. A couplet in the passage which tells of how the Fian burn Grainne after Diarmaid's death appears to have developed from a relative of Gillies q.26cd. The passage in which Diarmaid encounters the boar contains a quatrain for which I have not been able to identify a source.

It appears that stray material from several Diarmaid-ballads has been incorporated into the tale; some passages were apparently not identified as poetry by the reciter.<sup>156</sup> This suggests that the passages had been incorporated into the tale before Macalister learned it. Since at least two different ballads are involved here it is likely that the passages were introduced deliberately; it is even possible that originally longer passages were present, comparable in length to the '*S moch a ghoireas a chorr*' sequence, which subsequently became shortened in the course of transmission.

A clearer example of a similar process is present in a tale, *Bas Fhraoich*, which was collected in 1862 by Alexander Carmichael from Ceite Laoruidh in Lismore.<sup>157</sup> This tells the story of the death of Fraoch as in the ballad but localises events in Rannoch and attaches the Connacht hero to the Fian; this does, however, not intrude into the story. The prose parts of the tale are in the usual style of an oral folktale and the tale's interest derives from the verse passages that are interspersed. These passages are derived from descendant versions of the BDL text and can be paralleled by other versions from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ballad material has been incorporated in three different ways. Single lines or even short phrases from ballad lines appear within the prose passages and are highlighted in the printed text by the use of inverted commas. This might appear as an editorial decision, whether by Carmichael or J.F. Campbell, in order to demonstrate the extent to which the ballad has been built into the tale. The textual evidence, however, shows that these short passages from the ballad do not occur randomly. Fraoch is introduced as follows: *Fraoch - 'Fraoch Mac Maothaich nan arm geur - an duine gu léir, a bu mhaisiche 's an Fheinn*. The description of the monster uses ballad phrases as well: *fhuaire bhéist 'n a cadal. 'Na sioram suain, 'sa beul a suas ris an dos.*' The monster fight has the ending: *gus an do 'thuit iad le chèile, bonn ri bonn, 'air dubh-chladach nan clach lom, 'a bhos.*<sup>158</sup> These passages are memorable for their vivid descriptive detail and their survival may owe something to this quality. It may also be the reason for the emphatic way in which these passages occur within the text.

Some quatrains or passages are put in the mouths of ballad characters. Meadhbh (here: Maoidh) is portrayed as speaking the two quatrains in which she

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<sup>156</sup> This is implied by a footnote by J.F. Campbell in *PTWH* 3, p.53.

<sup>157</sup> *LF*, pp.32-33. The reciter's name is obscure and appears as *Ceite Laomidh* in *PTWH* 4, p.414.

<sup>158</sup> This passage also appears almost literally in q.6 of the printed text.

sends Fraoch to fetch the berries and the tree respectively. The praise passage which concludes the ballad in the verse-only texts is here given to Fionnabhair (here: Aoirinn). The two quatrains deal with key events in the ballad and the praise passage is again important because of the descriptive detail.

The third means of incorporating ballad quatrains involves the duplication of events. The prose passage describing the fight between the monster and Fraoch, the core event of the ballad, is supplemented by a verse passage which adds detail but no information that differs from the prose passage. This verse passage is explicitly described as having been composed to commemorate the event: *'S ann an sin a rinneadh na rannan a leanas.*

The ultimate starting point for *Bas Fhraoich* would seem to be a good version of the ballad, judging by the number and quality of the surviving quatrains and the proximity of the plot to the ballad plot. It appears that at some point, perhaps prior to the reciter who gave her version to Carmichael, a tradition-bearer was unable to remember the ballad in its entirety and supplemented the remembered parts with prose passages; this would account for the lines and phrases derived from the ballad being given considerable prominence. The qualities of descriptiveness and memorability of the surviving passages would appear to lend added weight to this suggestion.

In a curious echo of the *dindshenchas* tradition, *Bas Fhraoich* is given the secondary title *Loch Fraoich - mar a thainig an t-ainm air*. While there is a strong *dindshenchas* element in the ballad, which goes back to perhaps the fourteenth century,<sup>159</sup> its persistence into the second half of the nineteenth century is remarkable.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Meek: *HC*, discussion of BDL XXVII, sub-section d: conclusions about the relationship between TBF and the ballad.

<sup>160</sup> A planned section which was to set out the links of the ballad tradition with other genres of literature had to be abandoned due to lack of space. This covered the subjects of vernacular poetry, the tale of Fraoch, the *Acallam na Senórach*, *Dindshenchas* material, Romantic tales, and the role of international folktale motifs. I hope to comment on these matters elsewhere.

## **Chapter 2: Ballads and Society**

### **Section a: The Socio-Cultural Background**

The distinction between Irish scribal and Scottish oral tradition has to be considered in terms of the socio-cultural and political conditions between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century in both countries. It is clear that the attitudes towards heroic themes - and thus towards the ballads - that emerged during this period differed in Scotland and Ireland, and that different attitudes at various levels influenced the ballad tradition. An important difference between the Irish situation and the Scottish one appears to be that, somewhat paradoxically, the general upheaval of the seventeenth century in particular resulted in precisely the conditions that became instrumental in the scribal preservation of the Irish ballad material. Comparable developments took place in Scotland only in the eighteenth century, by which time the ballads had already been absorbed comprehensively into an oral context and, as the extant texts suggest, were cushioned from the repercussions of social and political change.

#### **The Irish background**

The replacement of the native aristocracy with Protestant incomers began with the sixteenth century Tudor plantations and gathered momentum after the Flight of the Earls in 1607. English landowners, and some Scottish ones in Ulster, became an important economic factor in Ireland by introducing innovations which increased their wealth. Native landowners began to conform to the economic and cultural example of the incomers in order to improve their own economic situation and demonstrate their loyalty by following and promoting English ways. The settling of British tenants brought considerable financial advantages for landowners and close on 100,000 people are estimated to have migrated to Ireland between 1600 and 1640.<sup>1</sup> Connected with political and economic developments was the widening gulf between the successful Protestant minority and the Catholic majority.

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<sup>1</sup> N. Canny: 'Early Modern Ireland c.1500-1700' in: R. Foster (ed.): The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland; Oxford/New York 1989; pp.138-139.

Seventeenth century poetry comments on contemporay upheavals in political and personal terms. For the professional poets, the removal of the native aristocracy meant the removal of their livelihood and of their *raison d' être*. Given the political climate, the new landowners, alien in language and culture, could hardly be expected to act as patrons to the spokesmen and propagandists of the old order. Some learned men went into exile along with the nobility; together with clergymen who fled religious persecution they formed an important intellectual élite of Irish scholars whose historical, religious, and grammatical writings also have a political angle in their didactic aspect.<sup>2</sup> *Duanaire Finn* is a product of the Irish intelligentsia in exile which illustrates a continuation of patronage involving the scribes, Niall Gruamdha Ó Cathain and Aodh Ó Dochartaigh, and the patron, Somhairle Mac Domhnaill. It is evident that the exiles strove to preserve their revered literary traditions while also adapting their current literary modes of expression in order to function adequately in, and to respond to, a changed political and cultural world, for instance by the incorporation of Counter-Reformationary ideas into material with a religious dimension.<sup>3</sup>

Whether at home or abroad, the poets continued to view the world in terms of Gaelic society. The nobleman and his poet fulfilled complementary roles: the nobleman acted to maintain or improve his position with regard to his peers and the poet commented on his patron's achievements and - if required - on how events and developments from the outside impinged on the patron and his circumstances. In the past, this poet-patron relationship had served both sides well and had been able to withstand or absorb any threat to the integrity of society. At any rate, this perception prevails in bardic poetry and in the traditional presentation of Irish history. Disaster may strike in the shape of death or dispossession but in the traditional model it does not affect the ultimate balance of society; often, disaster would be reversed by subsequent events. This world-view corresponded in broad terms to the historical reality of the past; its detail, however, was concerned with interpreting events according to historical or literary precedent, and the flexibility of detail provided by the conventions of bardic poetry provided the vehicle for this. Since the poets were accustomed to analysing, and commenting on, events to make them conform to their traditional world-view, they were astute observers of politics. Yet their way of reflecting this in their poetry is wholly traditional and does not develop into a new ideology to answer to the changed political realities. In the poets' defence it must be

<sup>2</sup> J.T. Leerssen: *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael*; Amsterdam/Philadelphia 1986; pp.298-303.

<sup>3</sup> T.J. Dunne: 'The Gaelic Response to Conquest and Colonisation: The Evidence of the Poetry' in: *Studia Hibernica* 20 (1980); pp.17-18.

said that the provision of new intellectual, political, or historical models was not part of their training or their function within society. Had the Irish leaders of the seventeenth century been able to respond to the threat to their culture and way of life in a way which provided innovative answers to the political threat, then the poets might have turned their intellectual powers to the rationalising of their leaders' actions by formulating a suitable ideology.<sup>4</sup>

A Catholic-led rising in 1641 was unsuccessful because of disagreement between factions. Following Oliver Cromwell's arrival in 1649 came the wholesale confiscation of Catholic-owned estates as well as the persecution of the Catholic clergy as part of a bid to convert Ireland to Protestantism. The remaining Catholic landowners were transplanted to the poor province of Connacht. Political expediency prevented a reversal of the Cromwellian settlement at the Restoration although religious persecution was scaled down sufficiently for the Catholic church to re-establish its influence.

Following the replacement of James VII/II by William of Orange in 1688, repeated defeats for the French-augmented Irish army led to another exodus of Irish leaders, this time of the officers in James' army. Further confiscation of Catholic property and the enforcing of anti-Catholic laws ensued.<sup>5</sup> The penal laws of the early eighteenth century aimed at excluding the Catholic element of Irish society from participation in public life and from improving their economic situation, leading to the consolidation of the Protestant Ascendancy. Some Catholic landowners remained, and a class of Catholic merchants emerged in the towns, but neither was able or likely to disrupt the political *status quo*. A gradual and partial relaxation of the penal laws only began in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

Education was provided by a variety of schools of varying efficiency and geared towards their conversion to Protestantism. Much more widespread and popular, because of their link with Roman Catholicism, were the so-called hedge schools. Their importance is reflected in the value the Catholic peasant class placed on education. Although technically illegal institutions until the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829,<sup>6</sup> the hedge schools enjoyed the support of the population and flourished particularly in the remote parts of the country which contained the core of the Irish-speaking population. Subjects included the basic ones and the Classics and whatever the schoolmaster was qualified to teach; in Irish-speaking areas, the medium of instruction was Irish although English was starting to encroach at the beginning of

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<sup>4</sup> M. O Riordan: The Gaelic Mind and the Collapse of the Gaelic World; Cork 1990; p.298.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp.150-153.

<sup>6</sup> P.J. Dowling: The Hedge Schools of Ireland; Cork 1968; p.25.



the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The importance of the hedge schools for literacy in Irish and the preservation of literature cannot be underestimated, especially since the profession of schoolmaster could be combined with that of scribe or poet.

Political matters, firmly in Protestant hands, were characterised by distrust of Catholics. The rural economy was generally stable, especially in the second half of the century; trading infrastructure and foreign trade expanded, especially with England.<sup>8</sup> Catholics were remote from political action; the Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1745 had no parallels in Ireland. The major instance of politically-motivated violence of the eighteenth century, the United Irishmen's Rising of 1798, was induced by dissatisfaction over taxation and by nationalist ideas derived from the French Revolution; events were not dominated by a Catholic agenda or Catholic leaders.

Catholic emancipation was still a political subject after the Act of Union in 1800 but those who stood to gain most from it were the inhabitants of the towns. Small farmers and smallholders made up much of the rural population; some of the smallholdings were tiny after frequent subdivision but the land was capable of supporting a much increased population at subsistence level until the Famine of 1845-1846. This and the subsequent wave of emigration had its most severe effects on the rural Irish-speaking population. As a result, the decline of Irish language and culture accelerated even in the areas that were previously least subject to English influence.

By the time of the Ascendancy the remaining leaders of Gaelic society and their poets had moved down on the social scale. Those who had an interest in maintaining the old order had been relegated to the peasant class or to a social level not far above that. Politically and economically, their influence was small; intellectually, their course of action was to preserve the literature and the memory of their glorious past. The part of society the poets now moved in could not maintain a specialised class of learned men; with the patronage system severely curtailed, the standard of poetic expertise dropped, emphasising the need to preserve the examples of previous achievement. The lost Golden Age that literature depicted, complemented by the poets' acute awareness of their loss of privilege, contrasted sharply with eighteenth century reality.<sup>9</sup> For the men of learning, the preservation of the tangible reminders of their former glory became an important task. Significant support in this came from the Catholic church since the importance of the Irish language for the preservation of the Catholic faith in Ireland had long been recognised. Churchmen

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.43.

<sup>8</sup> R.F. Foster: 'Ascendancy and Union' in: R. Foster (ed.): *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*; Oxford/New York 1989; pp.169-170.

<sup>9</sup> Canny, op.cit. pp159-160.



appear among the *literati* and in the role of patrons;<sup>10</sup> they were also involved in the furthering of education in Irish. The literary tradition that the manuscripts reflect enjoyed the approval of the Catholic church as well as the prestige imparted by its antiquity and its significance in an historical and ideological context.

The heroic ethos that formed the ideological basis of the old Gaelic order is reflected in its literature.<sup>11</sup> The heroic aspect of genealogy or panegyric would have appealed to a court of poetry, or to the writer of a manuscript, but an audience consisting predominantly of peasants, however informed about the glorious past of the Gael, may have been less interested. The ballads, with the ever-popular Fionn among the protagonists, are a different matter since they combine heroic ethos with adventure and other ingredients with a popular appeal. With their emphasis on the lost Golden Age, exemplified by the lone survivor Oisín, the frequent learned references to keep the connoisseur happy, and storylines that make the Fian overcome all dangers, the ballads fulfil the ideological and psychological requirements for literature capable of providing an intellectual counterbalance to the realities of Ascendancy Ireland.

A few Protestants developed an interest in Irish learning and were keen to acquire manuscripts. In the seventeenth century, such an interest practical rather than founded upon admiration for Irish literature and culture: settlers saw it as an advantage to understand the history of the district they found themselves in.<sup>12</sup> The antiquarian interests of a significant minority among the educated in the eighteenth century turned towards Irish manuscripts as valuable repositories of historical information. Charlotte Brooke, of Protestant stock, was familiar with Irish and its vernacular literature since childhood, which was what enabled her to compile her collection and comment on it.<sup>13</sup> The fact that much contemporary scribal activity was directed towards the preservation of older material recommended the scribes' output to scholars and collectors. Native scholars like Charles O'Connor of Belanagare, well aware what texts were available, were in a position to inform their learned friends and stimulate collecting activity.<sup>14</sup> While it was still difficult for Catholics to be formally accepted as members of learned societies, this did not preclude scholarly contact and collaboration on a personal basis.<sup>15</sup> O'Connor was involved in the various committees

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<sup>10</sup> Ó Conchúir, op.cit. pp.225-226.

<sup>11</sup> O Riordan, op.cit. pp.216-217.

<sup>12</sup> B. Cunningham and R. Gillespie: 'An Ulster Settler and his Irish Manuscripts' in: *Éigse* 21 (1986); pp.27-28 and 35-36.

<sup>13</sup> Breatnach: 'Two Eighteenth Century Scholars' p.93.

<sup>14</sup> N. Ní Shéaghdha: 'Collectors of Irish Manuscript: Motives and Methods' in: *Celtica* 17 (1985); pp.9-10.

<sup>15</sup> C. O'Connor: 'Origins of the Royal Irish Academy' in: *Studies* 38 (1949); pp.326 and 332.

and societies that preceded the founding of the Royal Irish Academy in 1785 and was able to bring his scholarly expertise to this body on a more formal basis when he was elected a member.<sup>16</sup> The first volume of transactions published by the RIA contains a collection of Scottish Gaelic ballads obtained by the Rev. Matthew Young; this was presented in the 'Antiquities' section but Young comments on their literary significance as well.<sup>17</sup> The eighteenth century idea of 'antiquities' allowed for an interdisciplinary approach although the historical view predominates.

The gradual relaxation of the anti-Catholic laws in the nineteenth century contributed to the development of a more favourable attitude towards Irish culture among the Protestants. Landowners and professionals now appear among the collectors of manuscripts and are involved in learned societies alongside scholars and antiquarians. While the historical aspect is emphasised, a concern for the preservation of the declining Irish language and its literature comes to the fore.<sup>18</sup> The preoccupation with history is well illustrated by the volumes published by the Ossianic Society of Dublin which draw their subject matter predominantly from the Fionn-context. Nicholas O'Kearney, in his introduction to the *Cath Gabhra* volume, emphasises the historicity of Fionn and Fionn-traditions.<sup>19</sup> He draws on such sources as annals, ballads and tales, and historical writings to argue his point; the discussion of his *Cath Gabhra* material as literature is secondary. In this, he follows both the perceptions of the subject current in his time and the view proposed by tradition.

### **The Scottish background**

One of the aims of the plantation of Ulster initiated by James VI/I was the physical separation of the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland.<sup>20</sup> This curbed the influx of fighting men from the Highlands who had long been active in Ireland and made their contribution to the political instability of that country. The problem of the Highlands' unruliness, however, could not be solved by a plantation policy, for economic reasons. The subsistence agriculture and the cattle exports that were the mainstay of most of the Highland economy could not be made the basis for large estates run for profit. An attempted colonisation of Lewis begun in 1597 by the 'Fife Adventurers'

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.336.

<sup>17</sup> M. Young: 'Ancient Gaelic Poems respecting the Race of the Fians, collected in the Highlands of Scotland in the year 1784.' in: *TRIA* I (part 3: Antiquities) (1787); pp.43-119.

<sup>18</sup> Ní Shéaghdha, op.cit. pp.12-13.

<sup>19</sup> *TOS* I, pp.9-67.

<sup>20</sup> A.I. Macinnes: 'The Vernacular Response to the Covenanting Movement' in: J. Dwyer, R.A. Mason and A. Murdoch (eds.): *New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland*; Edinburgh 1981; pp.59-60.

ran into difficulties and was abandoned in 1607.<sup>21</sup> There was no sustained military campaign during the reign of James VI to quell the endemic unrest that characterised the Highlands in the seventeenth century. Instead, the attempts made to bring the chiefs in line with the rest of the kingdom involved legal and educational measures to ensure their conformity and obedience.

The Statutes of Iona of 1609 and follow-up legislation in 1616 stipulated that the children of the chiefly and tacksman classes were to receive their education in the Lowlands. Foreign education was not new for Highland aristocrats<sup>22</sup> and the new legislation formalised and regulated a trend already in existence but it did not directly affect the majority of Gaelic speakers. It did, however, initiate the systematic alienation of the leaders of society from Highland culture and language. Many chiefs became attracted to a Lowland lifestyle during the seventeenth century and ran into debt because their estates could not support the new expense. The tacksman class, less prone to extravagance, were the first to notice the threat to the social fabric since they were in charge of collecting rents and managing the clan lands.<sup>23</sup> The emerging tensions are the subject of criticism of the chiefs voiced by some of the vernacular poets who began to fear for their status within society as they observed the increasing adherence of their patrons to alien social and cultural standards.

Other aspects of the Statutes of Iona show them to be aimed as much against social conditions as against language. Attempts to limit the bearing of arms and to curtail traditional hospitality aim directly at values of a society still based on heroic principles. Parallel to such measures, attempts were made to establish schools to teach English to a wider section of society on a parish basis. This was combined with a drive to expand religious instruction to the entire population in order to promote stability.<sup>24</sup> Gaelic was widely regarded as an obstructing factor in the creation of a well-ordered society and its eventual extirpation was a declared aim of the school system from the beginning. The impracticalities of this policy in a largely monoglot environment are obvious but it is likely that schoolmasters capable of, and willing to, teach English and Latin also provided literacy in Gaelic, as in the case of John Campbell who taught English and Irish (i.e. Gaelic) at Lochgoilhead in 1706.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> G. Donaldson: *Scotland - James V to James VII* (The Edinburgh History of Scotland); Edinburgh 1978 (first edition 1965); p.228.

<sup>22</sup> Macinnes, *op.cit.* p.61.

<sup>23</sup> I. Donnachie: 'Economy and Society in the Seventeenth Century in the Highlands' in: L. Maclean of Dochgarroch (ed.): *The Seventeenth Century in the Highlands*; Inverness 1986; pp.54-55.

<sup>24</sup> D. Withrington: 'Education in the Seventeenth Century Highlands' in: L. Maclean of Dochgarroch (ed.): *The Seventeenth Century in the Highlands*; Inverness 1986; p.61.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p.68.

As the vernacular poets rose to prominence in the seventeenth century the importance of the practitioners of bardic poetry declined. The professional bards adapted to the prevailing mode of poetic expression or faded away as the patron class was assimilated to Lowland standards. On the level of literature, the vernacular poets fulfilled essentially the same function as the professional bards although on a less sophisticated and exclusive literary level. They subscribed to the same traditional values that made society cohere and continued to use the same themes and imagery; therefore they were providing the means to ensure the continuity of the literary tradition. The political situation in much of the Highlands during the seventeenth century with its various military conflicts provoked a vernacular poetic response along traditional heroic lines.<sup>26</sup> The vernacular poets' compositions were geared towards appreciation or dissemination in an oral context, particularly the setting of the *cèilidh* house.<sup>27</sup> This would seem to be an important contributory factor that prevented the development of a separate and prolific scribal class to disseminate literature. The written aspect of Gaelic literature appears to have remained largely the domain of the professional bards although a written tradition in vernacular Scottish Gaelic emerges during the seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup>

The heroic outlook of Highland society promoted the continuation of old and recent feuds. This played an important role in the political polarisation that emerged at the time of Montrose's campaigns in the 1640s. The propagandistic element of the Campbell-MacDonald feud is prominent in the poetry of the vernacular commentators on the military successes of the Royalists.<sup>29</sup> The significance of the Highlands as a reservoir of fighting men was recognised during the Cromwellian occupation of the 1650s and answered by the establishing of garrisons. The means of keeping the peace in the Highlands were predominantly military during that period; unlike in Ireland, colonisation and displacement were not part of the disciplinary measures adopted.

Religion, the driving force behind Covenanters and Cromwellians and an important polarising force in Ireland, played a less significant role in the Highlands since the existing patchwork of Catholic, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian communities was chronically understaffed and unable to provide effective propagandistic networks. The fact that Catholics and Episcopalians together provided the support base for the Stewarts precluded a simple polarisation of Catholics and Protestants

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<sup>26</sup> Macinnes, op.cit. p.77.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.76 and D.S Thomson: *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*; London 1974; p.217.

<sup>28</sup> This, however, is not relevant to the context of the ballads.

<sup>29</sup> Macinnes, op. cit. pp.83-84.

anyway. Loyalty to the Stewarts, who could trace their line back to the Gaelic kings of Scotland, was of immense ideological value in a kin-based society and was duly exploited by the later Jacobite propagandists. It is significant that the reaction to the events of 1688 was strongest in Ireland and Scotland where military campaigns were needed to enforce government rule.

The political conditions of the first half of the eighteenth century provided the Highlands with the background for a perpetuation of the ideology of an heroic society. This fact was exploited by the poets of the time who supported the Jacobite cause and drew on the heroic themes and conventions of earlier literature. In a less political context, the custom of the cattle raid was still followed in parts of the Highlands and provided an opportunity to practise skills associated with heroic behaviour.<sup>30</sup>

Although practitioners of bardic poetry survived into the first half of the eighteenth century, the formal teaching of bardic skills and learning had virtually ceased by this time. A core of literate individuals remained, usually with an interest in literature, who were able to pass on at least the Irish hand and an appreciation of the poetry and literary culture of the professional poets. Even an eminent figure like Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, who had learned to read and write the Irish hand from his father, himself a poet, and was both a scribe and collector of manuscripts, felt that his lack of formal training made him an inferior poet.<sup>31</sup> His contemporary William MacMurchy, a Kintyre man, used the Irish hand to write old and new poetry in his surviving manuscripts.<sup>32</sup> At the end of the century, Peter Turner was able to read and copy an Irish manuscript but used a contemporary hand himself; his version of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* ends with the word *finis* in Irish letters but the writing is far from fluent.<sup>33</sup>

Schooling in the eighteenth century was still closely connected to religious instruction. Although Gaelic was acceptable in spiritual matters, it was only seen as a means to an end, namely to predispose the population towards the eventual acquisition of English.<sup>34</sup> In 1709, the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) was founded to teach of English in charity schools and to

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<sup>30</sup> W.H. Murray: Rob Roy MacGregor - His Life and Times; Edinburgh 1993 (1st edition 1982); pp.28-30.

<sup>31</sup> R. Black: Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair - The Ardnamurchan Years; Coll (The Society of West Highland and Island Historical Research) 1986; pp.12-14.

<sup>32</sup> For example NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.2.

<sup>33</sup> In NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.7. The text is given in the Appendix, Part 1, Irish Texts: section a: Irish Versions of *Innis dúinn a Oisín*.

<sup>34</sup> C.W.J. Withers: Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981; Edinburgh 1984; p.118.



provide religious instruction.<sup>35</sup> The SSPCK consistently took an anti-Gaelic stance in its policies but allowed a certain amount of Gaelic to be used in teaching for obvious practical reasons. Schoolmasters, although required to be literate and fluent in both English and Gaelic,<sup>36</sup> taught English, Presbyterian religion, church music and arithmetic but were not allowed to teach the reading and writing of Gaelic.<sup>37</sup> No funds were made available for the provision of Gaelic teaching materials, apart from copies of the Irish Bible and a Gaelic vocabulary.<sup>38</sup>

It appears that the provision of schools under the auspices of the SSPCK and other bodies did not cover all Highland parishes at all times and therefore did not reach the entire population of potential pupils.<sup>39</sup> A scattering of Catholic schools existed at the beginning of the eighteenth century but it is unclear what place the teaching of Gaelic took in their curricula.<sup>40</sup> Other problems include a scarcity of suitably qualified schoolmasters or a population too widely scattered to benefit from the parish school. Yet the emphasis on English inculcated even in the minds of monoglot Gaelic speakers the idea that Gaelic was an inferior language.<sup>41</sup> This was in stark contrast to the experience of the *cèilidh*-house where Gaelic was the sole vehicle of communication and provided both education and entertainment in an oral context. Ministers, catechists, and schoolmasters were aware of the significance of the *cèilidh*-house, especially those with an interest in the Gaelic tradition, of whom there were significant numbers to judge by the extant material they collected, and in some instances, composed. They must have felt the intellectual tension caused by their remit, to further the use of English in the Highlands in order to assimilate the population, and their regard for Gaelic literature. Perhaps the tension was eased by the necessity of using Gaelic in the effective discharge of their duties and it is likely that some schoolmasters at least were prone to interpret the rules more freely than the SSPCK intended. Both James McLagan and Duncan Kennedy state that they started their collections of ballads while still at school and it is hard to imagine that their respective teachers were unconnected with this kind of activity.<sup>42</sup> At the very

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.120.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.123.

<sup>37</sup> J.L. Campbell: *Gaelic in Scottish Education and Life*; Edinburgh 1950 (second edition); p.55.

<sup>38</sup> Compiled by Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair in his capacity of SSPCK schoolmaster and published in 1741. See Black, op.cit. pp.24-26.

<sup>39</sup> Withers, op.cit. pp.129-132 (esp. figures 22-25).

<sup>40</sup> Campbell. op.cit. p.58.

<sup>41</sup> Withers, op.cit. p.133.

<sup>42</sup> Thomson: 'The McLagan Manuscripts;' p.407. See also chapter 6, section c, sub-section: '*S muladach mi an dèidh Chaoilte* (Kennedy's text of '*S muladach mi...*'). Ronald Black informs me that a substantial amount of evidence exists for the teaching of Gaelic in schools in the mid-eighteenth century,



least, such young collectors must have had a degree of literacy in Gaelic if not an understanding of the literary background of their material. Kennedy's long 'arguments' that preface his ballad texts betray the presence of Gaelic sources that go beyond the ballads; on the other hand, the fact that the 'arguments' are in English is proof of the influences that worked on the mind and attitudes of the educated Gaels of the time.

The prestige language of literacy was English and while literacy in Gaelic was still attainable and widespread enough to sustain the printing of Gaelic books the psychological damage was done. Those literate in both languages felt the need to rationalise and justify their interest in Gaelic by emphasising the antiquarian aspect. Especially from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards; the influence of literary theories derived from university study, and brought into focus by the Ossianic controversy, can be detected in the attitudes of the literate class. The traditions of the *cèilidh*-house were able to flourish independently since it appears that the problems connected with literacy had little direct bearing on an oral mode of transmission. The making and copying of manuscripts can be seen to owe its inspiration partly to the intellectual influences that came into the Highlands as a result of the official educational policies and via the educated classes; there is also some evidence for the continuity of the native literary tradition, for instance in the scribal work of Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and William MacMurchy.

The pattern set in the eighteenth century continued in the nineteenth despite the fact that formal education was still not available to the entire population of the Highlands. An important development for Gaelic literacy came with the establishment of the Edinburgh Society for the support of Gaelic Schools in 1811; schools whose main aim was religious instruction were set up to teach the reading of Gaelic.<sup>43</sup> While the importance accorded to Gaelic in a spiritual context led to the preservation of a highly-regarded upper register of the language, many Gaels considered the schooling provided by the Gaelic Society schools a preliminary step to the acquisition of English as the key to education and economic prosperity.<sup>44</sup> This attitude was reinforced and encouraged by ministers and schoolmasters. Later in the century, the Education Act of 1872, which formalised education in Scotland, made no provision for Gaelic; despite a widespread desire in the Highlands to have the teaching of Gaelic included on a formal basis, only half-hearted concessions were made.<sup>45</sup>

To the psychological pressure exerted upon Gaelic speakers by the leaders and opinion-formers came the physical one of the Clearances. Knowledge of English

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<sup>43</sup> Withers, op.cit. pp.137-138.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.156.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, op.cit. pp.72-75.

became the passport to a better life in the industrial cities or the emigrant destinations abroad. Those who stayed on often faced a bleak future. With their culture and language held in disregard by their superiors, and often living in poverty, it is likely that the *cèilidh*-house provided an escape into the bright and still highly-regarded world of tale and poetry. The esteem that this tradition enjoyed may have been reinforced by the value accorded to Gaelic as the language of religion but it is also important to remember that various strands of Presbyterianism that emerged in the nineteenth century tended to supplant all traditions that were not connected to faith. As regards the heroic aspect of Gaelic culture, the genres of heroic literature now had no corresponding conditions in the way society thought and operated but may have been important on the level of escapist entertainment. It is interesting to speculate that the values embodied by poetry with a strong heroic bent, perhaps even the ballads in particular, played some small role in influencing the grassroots movement of the crofters who participated in the Crofters' War of the 1870s and 1880s; it is worth noting that Màiri Mhòr nan Òran, the spokeswoman of the crofters, hailed from Skye where there existed a vigorous tradition of ballads.

### **'Heroic' versus 'academic' attitudes**

Society in Ireland and Scotland still functioned largely according to the traditional heroic model in the seventeenth century, at least as regards the upper classes of society. On a lower level, the role model of the heroic fighter was perhaps less directly relevant but the attendant values would have been recognised and appreciated. Further ideological backing was provided by the professional poets. An 'heroic ideology' or at least heroic values and patterns of behaviour are also manifested in the ballads. As the ballads were accessible to those unfamiliar with the classical language they are likely to have played a role in promoting the heroic ethos at the learned and the vernacular level, especially since this was illustrated by a vivid and memorable plot in many cases. Whether or not this was intended by the original composers, the ballads can be seen to fulfil a specific function in emphasising one of the aspects which were vital for the cohesion of traditional society.

The constituent elements of such a society, namely an aristocratic warrior class to provide the heroic deeds and a caste of intellectuals to comment on heroic achievement and to consolidate the heroic ethos into an ideology that is accepted and approved of at all levels of society, were present in Ireland and Scotland at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Extant literature of the period is firmly placed in the context of an heroic society. Then the almost complete removal of the warrior

class in Ireland deprived society of its most important element in heroic terms and caused an imbalance in ideology as well as in the composition of society. The professional poets lost their *raison d'être* and their means of subsistence and descended several rungs on the social ladder, but they did not abandon all their literary skills and interests. A new aspect was added to their conservative and retrospective attitudes in the form of the idea that the old literature had to be preserved as a reminder of the glorious past.

While such literature had a certain immediacy as well as a practical ideological function in an heroic society, its value in the new conditions of society became largely academic. The medium of continued manuscript transmission, with only subordinate oral dimensions, is likely to have strengthened those attitudes. For Catholic Irish-speakers, access to the Protestant-dominated system of education, especially higher education, was difficult to attain and traditional learning may have been an attractive alternative. The material preserved by the scribes and scholars presented native culture in a positive light, in contrast to the attitudes towards Irish language and literature displayed by the ruling classes especially during the eighteenth century. To the scholars brought up with a regard for the native tradition, its preservation by scholarly methods was a way of counterbalancing the cultural pressures exerted by the official education system. Together with the hedge schools, the scribal culture of Ireland ensured the continuation of the heroic literary tradition in an environment which can be described as academic and antiquarian.

A rather different situation existed in Scotland in the seventeenth century. The political upheavals of the time did not result in the removal of the aristocratic class although a process of gradual assimilation to Lowland and later to English standards was initiated. The elements of an heroic society remain in existence until the aftermath of the '45.<sup>46</sup> The decline of the professional poets during this period was paralleled by the rise to prominence of the vernacular bards. Some of the material that belonged to the professional context was capable of passing into the vernacular oral tradition. This includes narrative texts, especially of the Ulster Cycle or relating to Fionn, in preference to the bardic praise poetry which was of limited appeal in a vernacular context.<sup>47</sup> It is likely that the ballads, especially ones with a strong narrative dimension, formed a significant section of this body of material although it is possible that the process of vernacularisation of aristocratic material had begun prior to the seventeenth century.

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<sup>46</sup> J. MacInnes: 'Clan Sagas and Historical Legends' in: *TGSI* LVII (1990-1992); p.382.

<sup>47</sup> K.H. Jackson: 'The Folktale in Gaelic Scotland' in: *Proceedings of the Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society* IV, no.3 (1952); p.134.

A poem by Finlay MacNab in BDL, beginning *Duanaire na sracaire*, proposes the compilation of a *duanaire* containing high-class material:<sup>48</sup>

q.7cd ná beir duan ar mhísheóladh  
go a léigheadh go MacCailéin.

One of the potential sources mentioned by MacNab is rather surprising in this context:

q.1cd fuaras féin don phacaire  
ní dá bhféadtar a líonadh.<sup>49</sup>

While there is no indication what sort of poetry MacNab's travelling packman may have had to offer, it seems likely that his contribution would have come from a vernacular oral rather than a professional context.<sup>50</sup> Not only does this couplet appear to demonstrate an awareness of an oral tradition that ran parallel to the bardic one, it also seems to indicate a willingness to accept its literary value by suggesting its inclusion in a prestigious manuscript. This may perhaps be taken as evidence for a more broad-minded attitude than is normally associated with the members of the learned classes at a time when the bardic system was still fully functional. Such connections between the vernacular and the learned environment may be features peculiar to the Scottish situation, especially if it is taken into account that classical metres were treated less strictly by Scottish professional poets.<sup>51</sup> Also, the transition from what appears to have been the parallel existence of bardic and vernacular poetry in the seventeenth century to an exclusively vernacular literature in the eighteenth was not accompanied by as many expressions of a traumatic experience as it was in Ireland. In the end, after the vernacular poets had supplanted the professional bards, they continued to address the aristocracy of the continuing heroic society in terms not much different in imagery and perspective from bardic poetry. The important difference between the two styles of poetry lies in the greater capability of vernacular poetry for dissemination and transmission in an oral context. The aristocratic input which ultimately derived from the bardic tradition imbued the vernacular material

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<sup>48</sup> W.J. Watson: *Bàrdachd Albannach*, pp.2-5. The excerpts below are on pp.2-3 where Watson translates: 'bring unto MacCailéin no poem lacking artistry to be read.'

<sup>49</sup> Watson translates: 'I myself have got from the packman somewhat that may go to fill it.'

<sup>50</sup> D.S. Thomson: 'The Gaelic Oral Tradition' in: *Proceedings of the Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society* V, no.1 (1954); p.4.

<sup>51</sup> Watson, op.cit. p.xxi.

with added prestige and contributed significantly to the perpetuation of the heroic ethos at the intellectual level.

Conditions of society were reflected in an idealised way in the ballads which appears to have contributed to their popularity. Another significant factor in this context would seem to be the universality of Fionn-material. By contrast, texts like clan legends, with their local and personal associations, were most likely to flourish best in areas belonging to the respective clans they featured. This kind of limitation does not apply to the ballads although localisation has taken place in a number of instances.<sup>52</sup>

The predominantly oral mode of transmission in the vernacular tradition provided the main vehicle for the preservation of the ballads since the Highlands did not support a new class of scholarly scribes like the ones that were engaged in the preservation of texts in Ireland. Learning was acquired and perpetuated in the *céilidh*-house where the critical commentary of the audience also served as a back-up system to the memories of the performing tradition-bearers. The religious bias of much of the formal education in Gaelic that could be got in the Highlands meant that there was no opportunity for the native tradition to develop a significant written literature that encompassed the vernacular material. An 'academic' attitude as evidenced by the Irish scribal tradition could not develop in Scotland because almost the entire system of literature operated at an oral level, and until the middle of the eighteenth century in an heroic society. There was no need for the intellectualisation of literature and the ballads in particular because they were still understood at an heroic level. It could be argued that such understanding of an heroic ethos remained relevant for society for much longer than in Ireland. After all, old men alive in 1860, when J.F. Campbell was collecting his material, were quite likely to have met men who had lived through the '45 and to have heard first-hand accounts of actual heroic achievement not dissimilar in spirit to that displayed in the ballads. Such traditions were likely to be reinforced by the achievement of the Highland regiments in the successive military campaigns of the Napoleonic Wars and the British Empire.

The thematic and stylistic emphasis of the ballads on the heroic is also present in the other literary genres of Gaelic Scotland; more so, it could be argued, than in Irish literature since material belonging to the Heroic Code is all but ubiquitous. Combined with the predominance of the oral tradition in Scotland, the heroic features of literature were also reflected and reinforced by the acceptance, largely theoretical from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, of heroic values throughout society. The

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<sup>52</sup> See chapter 3, section a: Location, Verisimilitude, and Ballads that 'Go Native.'



result is a literature which relies on the vivid image, the appeal to emotion, and clarity of expression. Medial orality thus leaves little room or need for abstraction or intellectualisation<sup>53</sup> since such features are primarily associated with a written tradition. The characteristics of the oral literature of Scotland are clearly manifested in the ballads where they have resulted in a modification of the genre towards greater vividness and immediacy of impact. These qualities are apparent even in texts which are at one or more removes from the oral tradition, as appears to be the case, for instance, in Jerome Stone's collection.<sup>54</sup>

By contrast, the Irish ballad tradition as manifested by extant manuscripts shows characteristics which are likely to be due to the different mode of transmission and the differences in attitudes within society. Generally, there is less emphasis on vividness and immediacy. Both the technicalities of scribal transmission and the attitudes of the literati tended towards the preservation of texts as a record of history and literature. The custom of reading aloud from manuscripts would at first sight appear to correspond to an oral context but this context is different from that of oral recitation within a predominantly oral tradition. The text that is read out does not vary from performance to performance. A significant section of the audience is likely to have been literate and therefore their appreciation of texts would be influenced by their ability of abstraction and intellectualisation acquired along with literacy. The fact that the ballads were originally composed for oral presentation would have ensured that they were accessible to the non-literate part of the audience but on the whole, literate aspects of tradition would seem to be of greater importance with regard to the Irish ballads.

## **Section b: Scribal Evidence in Scotland and Ireland**

### **The Irish scribal tradition<sup>55</sup>**

The gradual decline, in political and economic terms, of the Irish aristocracy during the seventeenth century was accompanied by the parallel decline of the bardic schools. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the former learned classes had

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<sup>53</sup> See also Thomson, *op.cit.* pp.3-4.

<sup>54</sup> MacKinnon: 'Collection of Ossianic Ballads by Jerome Stone,' pp.317-318.

<sup>55</sup> The source material in Scottish and Irish tradition is discussed in the Appendix, Introduction; section a.



undergone a radical reorientation. The privileged poets and scholars who had been able to concentrate full-time on the acquisition and cultivation of their art had fulfilled a well-defined function within society and had been maintained by a system of aristocratic patronage. That gone, the poet had to change his occupation, often to highly uncongenial tasks, and in consequence had less time at his disposal for poetry. Bardic skills and learning became attenuated while vernacular styles and metres began to be incorporated into learned poetry as its practitioners adapted to the situation. Courts of poetry took care of the standards of poetic composition where poets gathered to recite and listen to new poetry and take part in lively discussion.<sup>56</sup> Predominantly a phenomenon of the eighteenth century, most courts of poetry were found in Munster although there is evidence for their existence in Meath and southern Ulster as well.<sup>57</sup> The poets of the courts, as the successors of the professional poets, had a high regard for literacy hence were significantly involved in the copying of manuscripts. Their texts included the work of their predecessors - including the ballads - as well as recent and contemporary compositions. The gathering of a court of poetry provided an opportunity to exchange or borrow manuscripts for copying.<sup>58</sup>

Many scribes active in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would have been familiar with the operating principles of a court of poetry even if not all had first-hand experience of them. Scribal activity was not dependent on the existence of a court of poetry. The picture is clearest for the situation in Co. Cork where nearly 90 scribes are on record as active in the eighteenth century; in the following century, their number increased to c.140.<sup>59</sup> In c. 1726, a significant number of scribes operated in Dublin. A poem by Tadhg Ó Neachtain lists no less than 26 of them, including natives of the four provinces of Leinster, Connacht, Munster, and Ulster. Scribal material is extant for most of them.<sup>60</sup>

Most scribes were motivated by an interest in the works they copied and a desire to preserve the Irish language and culture<sup>61</sup> but scribal work alone was not enough to earn a living. Even an extremely prolific scribe like Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin worked as a schoolmaster.<sup>62</sup> Mícheál Óg's son, Peadar, the scribe of RIA 24 A 17, was at times employed as a teacher in farmers' households; at other times he worked

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<sup>56</sup> As described by D. Corkery: *The Hidden Ireland*; Dublin 1941 (third impression); pp.96-102.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. pp.120-122.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p.100.

<sup>59</sup> B. Ó Conchúir: *Scríobhaithe Chorcaí 1700-1850*; Dublin 1982; pp.224 and 227.

<sup>60</sup> T.F. O'Rahilly: 'Irish Scholars in Dublin in the Early Eighteenth Century' in: *Gadelica* (1912); pp.156 and 161-162.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Mícheál Óg's obituary quoted in Ó Conchúir, op.cit. p.133.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. pp.104-105, 108, and 117. For Mícheál Óg's scribal output, see ibid. pp.91-101.

as a labourer.<sup>63</sup> John Mara, the scribe of RIA 3 B 28, describes himself as 'woollen draper' in his manuscript. The profession of itinerant schoolmaster which many scribes followed indicates that there was a great regard among the Catholic Irish for education in Irish; often, schoolmasters were able to supplement this with Latin, Greek, and rhetoric, all taught through the medium of Irish. This went far beyond the subjects taught at elementary school.<sup>64</sup> The scribes' teaching activity also tied in well with the needs of the Catholic clergy since they regarded the Irish language as a strong ally in their efforts to stem Protestantism. Clergymen are prominent among the few individuals still able to act as patrons to scribes, especially in the eighteenth century.<sup>65</sup> The manuscripts the scribes produced in their spare time provided much-needed reading material for the people. Reading was a community affair, with somebody reading aloud or reciting from a manuscript to an audience. Apart from being a popular pastime in the early nineteenth century,<sup>66</sup> this ensured that there was a constant demand for fresh texts. By the 1880s, such gatherings had mostly become the preserve of the older generation, due to the steady decline of the Irish language after the Great Famine, even in Munster, although the telling of stories and the reading of poetry from manuscripts continued.<sup>67</sup> Scribal skills still persisted for manuscripts old and new to be copied. It is likely that literacy was more widespread in rural Ireland than anywhere else in Europe at the time, thanks to the efforts of the scribe-schoolmasters. It is also likely that literacy was highly regarded and relatively easy to attain since men of learning had long since become members of the rural population.<sup>68</sup>

A would-be scribe could learn his craft from a schoolmaster who was a scribe; or he could receive his training from his father in the time-honoured way of the learned men. Mícheál Ó Longáin, often named Mícheál mac Peadair to distinguish him from his son, died when Mícheál Óg was only four years old. Thus Mícheál Óg's schooling was often interrupted by the need to make a living as a herd boy but he still was able to learn English and Latin, while presumably acquiring a taste for Irish learning and literature as well. His scribal skills, he claims, were largely self-taught. '*...Ní bhfuil mé ach óg ar an scríbhneoireacht seo, agus bíodh a fhios agat ná fuair*

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. pp.139-140.

<sup>64</sup> L. Ó Danachair: 'Memories of my Youth' in: *Béalóideas* 17 (1947); p.60, referring to the early nineteenth century.

<sup>65</sup> Ó Conchúir, op.cit. p.226.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.228.

<sup>67</sup> Ó Danachair, op.cit. pp.58-61, recounts his childhood memories in Knockaderry, Co. Limerick.

<sup>68</sup> For the range of subjects taught in the hedge-schools, see Dowling, op.cit. pp.55-61.

*mé comhairle ná teagasc inti o neach ar bith.*' he writes in c.1785.<sup>69</sup> Mícheál Óg passed on his skills to his sons Peadar and Pól with whom he later collaborated in a large number of manuscripts.<sup>70</sup> Of Mícheál Óg's three other sons, only the youngest, Seosamh, followed in his father's footsteps as scribe and teacher and finally became scribe and copyist at the Royal Irish Academy in 1865, at a time when scribal activity was declining.<sup>71</sup>

It appears that the material contained in the manuscripts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries generally fell into the category of prestigious literature. The popular tradition of song is rarely represented, and the prose material consists of Romantic tales rather than folktales which belonged to an oral environment. This would seem to indicate that the ballads, represented in significant numbers in many manuscripts, were transmitted predominantly in the scribal context. The performance of ballads, in consequence, is likely to have consisted of their being read out aloud or recited from a manuscript. The recitation of ballads from memory by non-literate tradition-bearers was apparently practised as late as the first half of the nineteenth century in some parts of Ireland; an Ulster reciter, Abram MacCoy, who flourished in the mid-eighteenth century, is named as the last of his kind in that province.<sup>72</sup> Comparatively little information is available regarding the oral performance of ballads although a few recordings of sung ballads were made in the 1940s.<sup>73</sup> There are references to singing of ballads as well as extant ballad tunes, often without the associated words.<sup>74</sup> In general terms, oral versions of ballads - sung or recited - appear to have been best attested in areas where the manuscript tradition was weakest, e.g. in Donegal.<sup>75</sup> There was also the possibility that manuscript texts, which were, after all, read out to audiences, could influence a parallel oral tradition of ballads.

It is the manuscript tradition that is emphasised by Irish commentators on the subject of ballads. If there was a parallel oral tradition of ballad recitation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which seems likely in view of the evidence of surviving oral texts even in the twentieth century, it has failed to attract any attention among scribes or scholars. Our knowledge of the manuscript tradition is always

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted from M M.57 (a), a Maynooth manuscript, in Ó Conchúir, op.cit. p.102. Mícheál Óg's biography takes up pp.100-133.

<sup>70</sup> For scribal output and biographical detail of Peadar and Pól see *ibid.* pp.133-149.

<sup>71</sup> For Seosamh, see *ibid.* pp.149-158.

<sup>72</sup> N. O'Kearney (ed.): *Transactions of the Ossianic Society, for the Year 1853, Vol.I: Battle of Gabhra*; Dublin 1854 (cited as *TOS I*); p.19.

<sup>73</sup> H. Shields: *Narrative Singing in Ireland*; Dublin 1993; p.10.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* pp.16-24.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* pp.24-27.

going to be imperfect since large numbers of manuscripts were destroyed or lost. Thus, the material preserved by historians, antiquarians, and manuscript collectors, particularly in the nineteenth century, may not reflect the tradition accurately.<sup>76</sup>

### **The Scottish tradition**

Although the learned classes had persisted longer in Scotland than in Ireland they had not been succeeded by a class of educated scribes but by the bearers of oral tradition with whom they had previously coexisted. In the seventeenth century, members of the learned classes can be observed as scribes, for instance Niall MacMhuirich who compiled and wrote the *Clanranald Histories*.<sup>77</sup> As regards other scribes, it is not clear whether they were just scribes or learned men as well.<sup>78</sup>

There is evidence that Scottish *literati* were absorbing vernacular influences in the second half of the seventeenth century. Niall MacMhuirich produced poetry in both vernacular and classical Gaelic, apart from his historical writings.<sup>79</sup> His awareness of the importance of oral material is demonstrated by the contents of his histories which combine a variety of different sources, among them oral ones.<sup>80</sup>

The example of Niall MacMhuirich indicates that the professional poets were beginning to adopt the vernacular tradition that had run parallel to their own for so long. It seems likely that he and his learned contemporaries, aware of the traumatic developments that affected their Irish counterparts, felt that their particular brand of learning would come under threat in a similar way before long and that they would have to adapt.<sup>81</sup> Contemporary vernacular poetry has a strong bias towards prestigious aristocratic themes which may represent the actual transition of the learned poets to the vernacular side of the tradition. Unlike in Ireland, no class of learned scribes emerged although scribal activity persisted in some areas well into the eighteenth century. There was a core of individuals who could read the old manuscripts and who were able to write Scottish Gaelic but only a few of their manuscripts survive. They existed alongside others who were not necessarily literate

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<sup>76</sup> For a list of sources which illustrate the processes that underlie the loss of manuscripts see P. de Brún: '*Cnuasaigh de lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge: Treoirliosta*' in: *Studia Hibernica* 7 (1967); pp.174-175, note 22.

<sup>77</sup> W. Gillies: 'Oral and Written Sources and Effects in the *Clanranald Histories*' in: D. Scheunemann (ed.): *Orality, Literacy, and Modern Media*; Columbia 1996; p.27.

<sup>78</sup> D.S. Thomson: 'Gaelic Learned Orders and *Literati* in Medieval Scotland' in: *Scottish Studies* 12 (1968); p.68.

<sup>79</sup> D.S. Thomson: 'The MacMhuirich Bardic Family' in: *TGSI* 42 (1966); pp.299-300.

<sup>80</sup> Gillies, op.cit. pp.30-35.

<sup>81</sup> Thomson, op.cit. p.300.

but knew large amounts of traditional material and passed this on to their successors as they had learned it themselves, by oral transmission. Occasional overlap between the two traditions meant that the scribal side of affairs could act as a stabilising force on the oral tradition while oral material could provide the scribal context with new and different texts, as can be observed in the Gillies collection.<sup>82</sup> It is difficult to say for how long there had been a strand of oral tradition in the transmission of the ballads. The internal evidence of BDL suggests that its ballad material was drawn from manuscript sources although oral antecedents to these are a possibility.<sup>83</sup> This explains in part the strongly oral 'feel' of some of the BDL texts, especially the ones that are found in later Scottish tradition. Given the nature of the ballads as poetry composed for oral performance, it is possible to speculate that perhaps there was an oral dimension at least to the most popular of them right from the beginning. It appears that in the first half of the sixteenth century Scotland possessed a flourishing manuscript tradition which interlinked with this tradition of oral performance if not transmission, at least as far as the ballads are concerned. Although no firm evidence is available it seems that the reciters of the ballads for the most part belonged to the learned class of poets who also wrote the manuscripts, otherwise their texts would not have ended up in a manuscript with as strong an aristocratic bias in its choice of texts as BDL.

By the eighteenth century, the main vehicle of ballad transmission was the oral context. Manuscripts are still produced but their main function, as far as can be observed from the extant examples, is to receive material from the oral tradition. It appears that exchange between the written and the oral tradition had largely become one-sided, with the compilers of manuscripts incorporating oral material in their collections. It is relevant in this context that the formal education of many collectors had been conducted mostly in an English-language environment, in contrast to the Irish situation.<sup>84</sup> Since many collectors worked to satisfy their own interest, or collected on behalf of others, for instance the Ossian Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland, the likelihood of the manuscript texts returning into the oral environment was remote. The eighteenth century evidence of ballad texts represents examples of items then current in oral tradition, or of items transmitted in manuscript form but drawn from oral tradition in the recent past. In a number of cases, the oral pedigree of a ballad is well documented, e.g. the Rev. John MacKinnon's text of *An*

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<sup>82</sup> See also this chapter, section d, sub-section: Reciters and their sources (the Gillies collection and oral tradition).

<sup>83</sup> Meek, *HC*, p.18.

<sup>84</sup> See this chapter, section a, sub-section: Scottish manuscript sources.



*cuala sibhse turus Fhinn*,<sup>85</sup> while others represent the new manuscript tradition which is in most instances derived from oral tradition of the recent past. Jerome Stone appears to have copied from such manuscripts.<sup>86</sup> A version of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* appears to have been copied from Campbell of Portree's text which was collected from oral tradition in Skye in c.1797.<sup>87</sup> The main value of the eighteenth century manuscripts lies in providing primary material from a contemporary or recent oral context for analysis. What they cannot provide is evidence of continuity from the sparsely represented older manuscripts.

Nineteenth and twentieth century tradition can be regarded as exclusively oral in the sense that the extant texts were recorded in an oral environment. Occasionally, the reinforcing influence of printed works can be demonstrated.<sup>88</sup>

While the evidence of the collected texts suggests the continuity of the ballad tradition from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth, this is difficult to chart in detail. Eighteenth century collecting activity concentrated on the mainland districts of the Highlands, with particular emphasis on Perthshire. The Rev. Alexander Campbell's Skye collection of c.1797 is probably the most important exception to the general trend. Nineteenth century collecting reverses this by providing more material collected in the Hebrides than mainland texts. While general patterns of development can be observed throughout the corpus of extant texts, direct continuity can only be demonstrated in a few cases. Texts from oral tradition predominate in the nineteenth century but in the eighteenth century there is still a remnant of the manuscript tradition in existence.

## Section c: Collectors in Scotland: Attitudes and Methodology

The closest approximation in Scotland to the lively scribal culture of Ireland is found in manuscripts compiled by a variety of collectors during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Compared to the number of extant Irish manuscripts, this is not

<sup>85</sup> In NLS.Adv.MS.73.1.16 and given in the Appendix, part 2, Scottish Texts: section b: Scottish Variant texts.

<sup>86</sup> MacKinnon: 'Collection of Ossianic Ballads,' pp.317-318.

<sup>87</sup> In NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.10. Campbell's text, from NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.3, is given in the Appendix, Part 2, Scottish Texts: section a: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

<sup>88</sup> For an instance of survival of ballad material in oral tradition derived from the Gillies collection see this chapter, section d, sub-section: Reciters and their sources (the Gillies collection and oral tradition). For a link with Macpherson's Gaelic 'Ossian', see chapter 6, section d, sub-section: The unconnected texts (NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. Text C).



an extensive corpus of material. It is evident that it consists of a selection of the material then available in the Highlands rather than being representative of the entire tradition;<sup>89</sup> for instance, Perthshire, where much valuable ballad material was collected in the eighteenth century, is largely absent from the nineteenth century record. The existence of two distinct phases of ballad collection means that the first half of the nineteenth century, a period of social change which also impinged on literature, is largely unrepresented. It is possible to speculate that this gap in recording of material would not have arisen had there been a sizeable class of native scribes and scholars in existence. It is, however, evident that scribal activity in Ireland declined after the Famine - the Clearances might have had a similar effect.

### **The eighteenth century**

The existence of a gap in the extant textual evidence throws some light on the collectors themselves. As long as the Ossianic controversy was an important issue among the *literati* of the late eighteenth century, the educated gentlemen of the Highlands sought to contribute to the burning literary question of the day by collecting texts that might help to decide the matter. When the publication of the Highland Society's Report in 1805 in effect concluded the controversy in its main points, the same learned gentlemen moved on to other literary preoccupations. The first phase of ballad collection in the Highlands can be seen as motivated from outside the Gaelic tradition and not as part of an aspect of the native literary culture.

Ballads were not the only texts that were collected at the time. There was also a developing interest in Gaelic songs and their tunes. Again, factors from outside the tradition are evident in the collectors' noting down of the music. Given that they were dealing with an oral tradition - even *canntaireachd*, the 'musical notation' used in the teaching of piping, was an oral technique - they had no precedent to follow when presenting the music to a musically literate audience. As the songs did not follow current musical theory the collectors often adapted tunes to make them acceptable to a refined audience.<sup>90</sup> The provision of English translations in some song collections indicates a growing interest in Highland culture among the members of educated society who did not speak Gaelic. It is probably worth noting that most early collections of song were published in the first half of the nineteenth century, with a

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<sup>89</sup> Thomson, op. cit. p.1.

<sup>90</sup> W. Matheson: 'Some Early Collectors of Gaelic Folk-Song' in: Proceedings of the Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society vol.V, no.2 (1954) pp.75-76.

cluster of publications in the second decade of the century.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps this interest in Gaelic song is the natural successor of the interest in the ballads; song texts, for instance, are already well represented in the Gillies collection.<sup>92</sup>

By c.1760, the Highlands and their inhabitants had ceased to be a threat to the peace of the realm. The measures adopted for the pacification of the Highlands were calculated to strike at the lifestyle as well as the attitudes of Gaelic society and, in the long run, at the literature that was closely bound up with both. One wonders whether the collecting activity of some early collectors of ballads was not in part at least inspired by their observation of the effects of the post-Culloden legislation on their communities. James McLagan, for instance, was born in 1728 and would have been about eighteen years of age in 1746; by his own affirmation, he had begun collecting already by 1750, the year he matriculated at St. Andrews University.<sup>93</sup> His younger contemporary, Donald MacNicol, was born in 1735 and graduated from St. Andrews University in 1756;<sup>94</sup> his collection of ballads was made in c.1755. The sincere interest of both men in their native tradition is not in doubt; McLagan continued collecting a wide variety of material throughout his life and MacNicol was also a poet.<sup>95</sup>

Outside the Highlands, the removal of the potential political and military threat meant that the different language and lifestyle of the Gaels became the object of curiosity among the educated classes - a fact which James Macpherson was able to exploit successfully, not least because the skill of translation from Gaelic was not widely practised in the literary field. Despite the vehemence of the Ossianic controversy it is surprising that little of the oral material collected in the late eighteenth century was ever translated, far less printed. More texts in imitation of Macpherson were published at the time, both in English and in Gaelic, often with an impressive-looking scholarly apparatus in English and sometimes in Latin, designed to support their authenticity, as in the Rev. Dr. John Smith's *Sean Dàna* of 1787.<sup>96</sup> Smith borrowed Duncan Kennedy's collection of ballads and used it in the preparation of his *Galic Antiquities* of 1780, which contains the English versions of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. pp.67-74.

<sup>92</sup> I am not, however, in a position to comment on the situation regarding any unpublished collections of Gaelic song made at that time.

<sup>93</sup> Thomson, 'The McLagan Manuscripts,' pp.406-408.

<sup>94</sup> Hew Scott: *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ* vol.4; Edinburgh 1923; p.99.

<sup>95</sup> R. MacLeod: 'Mo Shùil ad Dhèidh: the Story of an Eighteenth Century Romance' in: *TGSI* LVII (1990-1992); pp.131-132.

<sup>96</sup> J. Smith: *Sean Dàna, le Oisian, Orran, Ullan, etc.* Edinburgh 1787. The output of this and other imitators is discussed in D.S. Thomson: 'Bogus Gaelic Literature c.1750-c.1820' in: *TGSG* V (1958); pp.172-188. Smith's work is dealt with on pp.180-181 and p.185.

the *Sean Dàna* material, and subsequently found himself criticised by Kennedy for having published translations of Kennedy's texts. The fact that Kennedy's Gaelic material differs significantly from Smith's English texts throws some doubt on the justification of Kennedy's accusation of theft of intellectual property; it would also seem to indicate that the practice, perhaps even the concept, of a close and accurate translation from Gaelic into English had not yet been developed.<sup>97</sup>

Smith's *Sean Dàna*, with its learned footnotes, was aimed at an educated Gaelic-speaking reading public, that is, the ministers, schoolmasters, and the remaining native gentry of the Highlands. If Smith's Gaelic texts were ever read out in the environment of a *céilidh* they do not appear to have been readily accepted into the oral tradition; on the whole, Gaelic material which imitates Macpherson is, in comparison with the corpus of ballads, rarely attested in nineteenth century tradition.<sup>98</sup> Smith emphasises that he collected most of his material from oral recitation<sup>99</sup> but what was finally published had undergone extensive refashioning and is not paralleled in contemporary collections of material with an oral pedigree.

The Gillies collection, published in 1786, was aimed at the same audience but does not stress the largely oral dimension of its contents. Instead, the 'Advertisement by the Editor' refers to the collectors as 'several clergymen and other Gentlemen in the Highlands.' The literary value of the contents is said to be vouched for 'by persons well skilled in the Gaelic language, and who have good judgment and taste.'<sup>100</sup> Apart from these remarks the Gillies collection allows the texts to speak for themselves, excepting occasional lexical footnotes. Gillies' 'Advertisement' neatly sums up the collectors of the eighteenth century: with few exceptions, they belonged to the educated classes and their collecting was influenced by their own literary interest and that flexible attribute of the *litterati* of the time, 'taste.'

With this kind of intellectual background, one might expect eighteenth century collecting activity to have been idiosyncratic and haphazard. That this appears not to have been the case may be partly due to the fact that the ballads form an easily identifiable genre stylistically and thematically. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a certain systematic approach was stimulated by the interest taken by the Highland Society of Scotland in the Ossianic controversy although a

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p.182.

<sup>98</sup> For examples, see chapter 6, section d, sub-section: The unconnected texts. A fuller discussion of texts from or in imitation of Macpherson's work in oral tradition falls beyond the scope of the present discussion.

<sup>99</sup> *Sean dàna*; p.v.

<sup>100</sup> The unnumbered page on which the 'Advertisement' appears precedes the first text of the Gillies collection.

significant number of collections had already been completed by this time. The Highland Society circulated a questionnaire among suitable contacts throughout the Highlands in which information regarding poetry attributed to Ossian was requested. While there is the unavoidable reference to Macpherson, there is also recognition of the oral dimension of the ballads, and the questionnaire aims at eliciting the names, techniques, and, most importantly, the Gaelic texts of the tradition-bearers. A critical and diligent approach is requested of the recipients of the questionnaire.<sup>101</sup> Correspondence on the subject of Ossian's poetry is extant from as early as 1760 and continues into the early years of the nineteenth century.<sup>102</sup> Without the involvement of the Highland Society many collections might not have been preserved.

Not all the material that came into the hands of the Highland Society proved to be a genuine record of current oral tradition. Duncan Kennedy, for instance, refashioned the texts he had collected by refashioning lines and passages or by supplementing them with material of his own composition. Some of Kennedy's own quatrains imitate the ballad idiom with some success. His version of *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* includes a sequence of twelve quatrains (qq.85-96) listing the heroes who were killed at the battle of Gabhair. Some quatrains of this sequence are paralleled in other versions of the ballad but others are only attested in Kennedy's texts. Of these, he identified five as his own in his second collection (qq.92-96):<sup>103</sup>

q.88    *'S mharbhadh na Mic Luthaic,  
Na sea Mic san d' Athair;  
Mharbhadh og Rìgh Auna,  
'S mharbhadh ann Rìgh Laitheann.*

92.     *Mharbhadh an Dubh-chuimir  
Cruinne 's Balbh is Gáire;  
Fìr nan créuce calma,  
'S iad gu fal' chaidh fásail.*

<sup>101</sup> Highland Society *Report*, pp.2-3.

<sup>102</sup> Examples of this are printed throughout the Highland Society *Report*; further instances are found in a number of manuscripts in NLS, e.g. NLS.Adv. MS.73.2.11. - NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.13.

<sup>103</sup> *LF*; pp.187-188, quoting the first collection. For a more detailed discussion see chapter 6, section b: *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* and section c, sub-section *'S muladach mi an déidh Chaoilte* (Kennedy's text of *'S muladach mi...*). Qq.105-107, which conclude the version, are marked as Kennedy's own as well. Kennedy's manuscripts are extant in NLS.Adv.MS.72.3.9. and NLS.Adv.MS.72.3.10, and the ballad is found on pp.145-167 (ff.79r-90r) and pp.137-157 respectively.

93. *Mharbhadh Oscar Gharidh,  
Béirnnidh is Fad-lamhach;  
Is Clann-pháil o Teamhradh,  
Agus Fearraghuin gradhach.*
94. *Marbhudh naoi mic Mhine,  
Déud-gheal agus Ardan;  
Mor-ghlan maiseach fialaidh,  
'S Connlaoch ciatach áluin.*
95. *Mharbhadh ann an Tréun fhear.  
Deó-gréine agus Aillidh;  
'S tha Lubhar agus saor-ghlan,  
Shios r' a 'n taobh gun mháran.*
96. *Mharbhadh naoi mic Cholla,  
Goille 's na tri Sgáire;  
Ioghlán is Fionn Breatan,  
Mac Bhreastail 's naoi mic Smáile.*

The first couplet of q.88, which corresponds to BDL q.4ab, establishes the pattern which is continued by the rest of the sequence; it is possible that the quatrains not acknowledged as his own by Kennedy (qq.89-91) were composed by him as well since they are close in style and *dramatis personae*.<sup>104</sup> Kennedy collected ballads from a number of tradition-bearers, but although he remembers several of their names he does not appear to have noted down which reciter gave him which ballads.<sup>105</sup> It is very likely that Kennedy acquired several versions of many ballads from his informants, who were spread over localities as far apart as Kintyre and Lochaber. The differences between multiple versions would have been obvious to Kennedy. If such differences involved loss of quatrains in one version but not in another, as is likely in view of the tendencies of transmissional patterns, this may have suggested to Kennedy that new composition was an inherent and legitimate feature of the tradition. To some extent, oral tradition can operate in this fashion.<sup>106</sup> While contemporary theory observed the presence of textual variation the perception

<sup>104</sup> For a discussion of the personal names, see chapter 6, section b: *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*.

<sup>105</sup> Highland Society *Report*; pp.273-274.

<sup>106</sup> See chapter 3, section b, sub-section: complementary, compensatory, and elaborative innovation.



persisted that Ossian's 'original' poetry could still be recovered after eliminating what was seen as 'later accretion.' Kennedy's newly composed material falls into this category by anyone's standards and it appears that he was driven by less than innocent motives in at least some instances. In the *Cath Gabhra* ballad in Kennedy's second collection, several lines in a sequence of Kennedy's are compared to biblical passages (qq.35b, 36b, and 42c). A footnote in the manuscript by Donald Mackintosh of the Highland Society suggests that Kennedy here attempted to lend credibility to his own work.

## **The nineteenth century**

### John Francis Campbell of Islay

It could be argued that the second phase of ballad collection also owed its stimulus to outside influences, in the form of J.F. Campbell's discovery of German and Scandinavian material.<sup>107</sup> In contrast to the eighteenth century, however, an attitude developed which allowed the texts to be appreciated as literature in their own right without the undue influence of literary theories from the outside, led by Campbell's forceful assertion of the need for strict principles of recording. Campbell did not collect his material single-handedly but enlisted assistants who were paid for their efforts, as were the reciters involved.<sup>108</sup> Some of the assistants acted as copyists of manuscript material, for instance Malcolm Macphail and Donald MacPherson who provided transcripts of texts in the Advocates' Library<sup>109</sup> many of them published in LF. Other collaborators collected directly from reciters; much of the material acquired through their efforts remains unpublished.<sup>110</sup> A notable fact of nineteenth century collecting activity is the relative scarcity of clergymen among the collectors. The emergence of the Free Church as a result of the Disruption of 1843 and the subsequent development of its strong base in large parts of the Highlands had led to a significant change in attitudes towards the oral tradition. Spiritual reorientation often initiated a process of conscious rejection of anything not directly relevant to the faith. The oral tradition, along with music, was under the greatest threat from this development. For this reason, collecting activity in Free Church areas was low and

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<sup>107</sup> See Appendix, Introduction: section a: Sources.

<sup>108</sup> Maciver: Lamplighter and Story-Teller; p.14.

<sup>109</sup> Now NLS.

<sup>110</sup> For a list of contributors who collected material for PTWH, including references to reciters and their texts, see PTWH 4, pp.402-427. Note that not all texts mentioned were printed, especially a number of ballad texts.



little material has been recorded although Malcolm Macphail got several ballad fragments from the Lewisman Norman Murray in 1866.<sup>111</sup> It is possible that many collectors concentrated their activity in areas where there was less likelihood of widespread hostility towards the tradition. Not all Free Church ministers were opposed to worldly literature, however. The Rev. Thomas MacLauchlan, an eminent Gaelic scholar who published a pioneering edition and translation of BDL, supplied Campbell with several ballad texts from manuscript and oral sources.

Campbell employed among his collectors a schoolmaster (Hector MacLean), a gamekeeper (Hector Urquhart), a student (Donald Torrie), a labourer (John Dewar), a shoemaker (John MacNair), and an excise officer (Alexander Carmichael). Of these, Carmichael and Dewar went on to collect material independently and some of their texts have since been published.<sup>112</sup> A slim volume of six ballads with an Ulster dimension, mainly from BDL and eighteenth century manuscripts,<sup>113</sup> was edited by Hector MacLean who was also significantly involved in the publication of both *PTWH* and *LF*.<sup>114</sup> Another collaborator of Campbell's, Donald MacPherson, published a collection of poetry and song mostly collected in Lochaber; this ranges from seventeenth century material to contemporary compositions.<sup>115</sup> It appears that such collectors, familiar with the material they collected from childhood, acquired their literacy in Gaelic by means of the various types of schools then in operation in the Highlands. This new group of collectors was no longer dominated by university-educated individuals but instead would appear to include representatives from all sectors of society - Campbell was a member of the aristocracy. The influence of current literary theory that played an important role in the eighteenth century is no longer evident. Although Campbell discusses his material in terms of contemporary scholarship in the explanatory passages in *PTWH* and *LF* his decision to let the texts speak for themselves is of greater significance here. His presentation accepts variations, imperfections, and contradictions as an integral part of the oral tradition he is dealing with. He is also aware of the fact that often the meaning of an obscure passage can be retrieved by comparison with other versions, as he states in his introduction to Christina Sutherland's unpublished version of *An Ionmhuinn*, recorded in 1854:<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Printed in *LF*, pp.150, 164, and 212.

<sup>112</sup> Of Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, vols.1-6, Edinburgh 1900-1971, only the first two were edited by himself. Some of the Dewar material was published by J. MacKechnie (ed.): *The Dewar Manuscripts*; Glasgow 1964.

<sup>113</sup> H. MacLean: *Ultonian Hero Ballads*; Glasgow 1892.

<sup>114</sup> Maciver, op.cit. pp.12-14.

<sup>115</sup> D.C. MacPherson: *An Duanaire*; Edinburgh 1868.

<sup>116</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.6. ff.388-391.

'To be compared with other versions; and to be placed with these in the mean time. There is a curious corruption in this worth notice. The heir of Spain in one version is made the heir of the Bishop here and elsewhere he is son of the king of na h iorasmaile which is getting very near the Irish for Norway.

The reciters stick to the sources which make the assonance and make a curious jumble of words which they do not understand. Scribes are very apt to do the same.

It is only by striking a mean that the probable meaning can be got at, so the more versions the better!

Let us in all cases stick to the **Text** while we are collectors.<sup>117</sup>

'Sticking to the text' aptly summarises the fundamental principle of Campbell's work as collector and editor of texts from oral and manuscript tradition; it is even evident in the English translations of the PTWH texts which aim at giving the flavour of the original Gaelic as far as is consistent with intelligibility. In order to make a fair assessment of the texts collected from oral tradition Campbell demanded the highest standards of accuracy of his collaborators. He also returned to the source reciters of some of the PTWH material to compare their texts with the printed book in order to confirm the diligence of his collectors.<sup>118</sup> While he was usually not disappointed, there are instances where he felt the need to comment on inaccuracies that crept in through momentary carelessness, as in the case of Malcolm Macphail's copy of Christina Sutherland's version of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.<sup>119</sup>

This is the story of Bas Oscair but the metre is very different from the usual [ ]. It seems to be the poem printed at Page 133. Appendix to the Gaelic of the Book of the Dean of Lismore. Will Mr MacLauchlan be pleased to explain how it happens that this manuscript differs materially from the printed version.

1st Did he alter Cormag into Cairbar or has MacPhail done the other thing? No doubt somebody made a mistakes. But was it the Reciter, or the scribe, or the author, or my scribe? or Oisein or Ossian? Who went wrong as to

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<sup>117</sup> Campbell's emphasis.

<sup>118</sup> Maciver, op.cit. p.14.

<sup>119</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.7. fol.161. The text is given in the Appendix, Part 2, Scottish Texts, section a: Scottish Versions of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

Keating's History of Ireland, or set the manuscript proper names right according to Dean MacGregor. In making my text I shall have to do a great deal but I shall say exactly what I do in restoration, and selection. As the whole chronology is impossible it is important to stick to names of kings especially, for they may lead to correct history.

No explanation from either MacLauchlan or Macphail appears to be extant. The passage gives the impression that the subject of accuracy as an indispensable precondition for later conflation of texts or editorial activity was frequently and emphatically broached by Campbell in communicating with his collaborators. The criticism aimed at MacLauchlan is, to some extent, justified since the printed version of the ballad appears to have undergone some editorial tidying-up.<sup>120</sup> Most of this involves the regularisation of orthography, a procedure that Campbell rejected in his approach to orally collected texts, partly because it is likely to obscure dialectal variation and partly because of the significance of a reciter's exact words for the purpose of comparison. This difference in editorial methodology precluded a closer involvement of the renowned scholar MacLauchlan in the preparation of PTWH.<sup>121</sup> I am not sure what Campbell queries regarding Cormac and Cairbre as their roles in this version are paralleled exactly in the BDL text and in Irish versions of the ballad. Regarding Keating's account of the battle of Gabhair, Campbell is correct in noting a significant difference to the ballad although generally accounts which are primarily of historical significance diverge considerably in detail.<sup>122</sup> Much of the material accessible today, however, would not have been available to Campbell in 1872, when he wrote the above passage, and books published in Ireland may not have come his way in Scotland.

It is clear from the quality of the texts recorded by Campbell and his collaborators that he had chosen helpers who shared his enthusiasm for the task and who were able to track down good tradition bearers and elicit tales and ballads from them. In a climate of increasing disregard for Gaelic language and culture it was no mean achievement to overcome a reciter's very probable feelings of diffidence and fear of ridicule in front of an educated stranger looking for material from oral tradition. Campbell's collectors had grown up with the tradition themselves and were thus able to empathise with the reciters they sought out. In a way, they contributed to the reinforcing of a tradition that was to last into the twentieth century.

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<sup>120</sup> T. MacLauchlan (ed. + tr.): *The Dean of Lismore's Book*; Edinburgh 1862; pp.133-135.

<sup>121</sup> Maciver, *Lamplighter and Story-Teller*; p.29.

<sup>122</sup> See chapter 4, section a: *The Cath Gabhra* Texts and History.

### Alexander Carmichael

In his capacity as collector, Alexander Carmichael followed the principles of recording developed by Campbell meticulously; in most of the texts taken down from recitation he gives the name and circumstances of the reciter, the location and date of the recording, and important background information such as the pedigree of the text where this is available.<sup>123</sup> It is not unusual to encounter several copies of the same item made by Carmichael at different times. In some instances, there are textual differences between copies which are very likely the result of Carmichael's editorial activity.

A particularly striking example of this is present in the five copies extant of a version of *An Ionmhuinn*, of which four are indicated to be recordings of the same performance. One of these was supplied by Thomas MacLauchlan and copied by Malcolm Macphail for J.F.Campbell and explicitly identifies Carmichael as the collector.<sup>124</sup> The remaining four copies are in the Carmichael-Watson collection.<sup>125</sup> Of these, the first version given in C.-W.340 (A) stands out because it is much longer than any of the other four; it is also the only version which lacks information about reciter and collecting date. The other four copies consistently name Alexander Matheson, or Alasdair Mothanach, of Kintail, as the reciter and the date of collecting is given as July 9th, 1861. Even if we allow for scribal errors and misreading of Carmichael's handwriting in the case of Macphail's copy, there are still a considerable number of changes which are likely to be the result of editorial interference. There are also indications that yet more copies of the same text existed since Campbell, in his introduction to the text, refers to one in his possession which does not seem to be extant. Material peculiar to this version but absent from the C.-W. texts indicates that Macphail had yet another text, apparently now lost, at his disposal.

Briefly, NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.6., C.-W.112 and C.-W.103A can be seen as sharing a greater number of features with each other than with either C.-W.340A or B; in some cases, C.-W.340A agrees with the group of three while C.-W.340B gives

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<sup>123</sup> Much of his collected material in the Campbell papers in NLS, the Carmichael-Watson collection of Edinburgh University Library, and in papers associated with George Henderson in Glasgow University Library remains unpublished. MacKechie's *Catalogue* has proved to some extent unreliable in its descriptions of post-Classical manuscript material, particularly in the case of Carmichael's papers where the existence of multiple copies of items is entirely unrecognised. Omissions and misdescriptions occur as well.

<sup>124</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.6. ff.381-386.

<sup>125</sup> One in C.-W.112 (pp.270-273), another in C.-W.103A, and two more in C.-W.340, described here as texts A and B.

differing readings. C.-W.340A, however, differs in an important aspect from the rest as it incorporates lines and quatrains which do not occur in the other versions. The sources of most of these additional lines and quatrains can be identified as belonging to other ballads of the *Ionmhuinn*-type; in some instances, lines and quatrains which appear in C.-W.340 but differ in NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.6. can be shown to have come from other *Ionmhuinn*-type ballads as well. Some specific source text can be identified for some of the additional material, for instance the Gillies collection, Christina Sutherland's version from Caithness,<sup>126</sup> Hector MacDonald or Eachun Donullach's from Skye,<sup>127</sup> and Donald MacPhie's from Barra;<sup>128</sup> for other passages, no identifiable sources are apparent. Two possibilities suggest themselves in this context: one is that the sources for this material do not survive, the other would suppose Carmichael as the author of the quatrains in question. The following passage - from C.-W.340A - contains a sequence from Matheson's original text, material added from MacPhie's version (underlined), and a passage not paralleled elsewhere and therefore most likely composed by Carmichael (in bold print). The unsupplemented text from NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.6. is given for comparison; small capitals indicate differences in shared material.

NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.6.

3. *Aithris dhuinn tamull mar sin,  
Us toill mo bheannachd Oisein;*

*Chuannacas bean anns a mhagh,  
'S a' tighinn na h onar*

4. *Bu ghile 's bu deirge gruaidh,*

C.-W.340A

4. *Chunna mis uair teolach Fheinn*  
*Us iad gu mor mear meinmneach eibhinn*  
*"Airis dhuinn tamul mar sin*  
*Us toill mo bheannac Oisein."*

5. *La dha'n ro sinn uile, 'n Fheinn*  
*Eir sliabh Sheallama' nan struth dian*  
*Chunnacas bean anns a mhaogh*  
*'S i tighinn na h-onar.*

6. *Chunnacas nighean bu ghlan snuagh*<sup>129</sup>  
*Bu ghile 's bu deigh gruaidh*  
*Bha da rosg aluinn na ceann*  
*'S i g amharc falachaidh mu tiomachioll*

<sup>126</sup> Extant in NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.6. ff.388-391.

<sup>127</sup> Several copies of this version are extant: LF p.137, NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. ff.245-246, C.-W.103A, C.-W.112, and C.-W.224.

<sup>128</sup> Extant in NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. ff.77-80.

<sup>129</sup> This appears to be MacPhie's line, supplemented by *chunnacas* from the previous quatrain, line c.



*B' ailli 's no gathan greine;*

*BRAGHAD MIN FO CAOL-LEINE,<sup>131</sup>*

*Earradh do sgarlaid DO sgeimh oirre.*

*5. Dunadh oir na bratudh (brat-dugh) uaine, US dunadh oir na bratudh uaine*

*Le clachan buadhach 's iad sar shnudh;*

*Bha fainntean oir aic air gach meur<sup>132</sup>*

*Le dunadh aluinn eugail.*

*7. Bha leine dha'n t-srol a b-uire*

*Mu cneas gradhach caoin cumhraidh*

*'S gum b-ailli no na gatha greine<sup>130</sup>*

*A brollach sneacaidh fo a caomh leine.*

*8. BHA earradh do sgarlaid CUIR sgeimh oirr'*

*Le clachun buadhach 's iad sar shnuadh OR*

*Le dunadh aluinn eugail*

*9. Bha slauraidh oir ma geala bhraigh*

*Us bha lasg'raich ghaire ma ceann.<sup>133</sup>*

It seems likely that Carmichael was trying to produce a more complete version of the ballad by supplementing Alexander Matheson's version with material from other sources, mainly from his own informants.<sup>134</sup> For the most part, existing episodes of the ballad have been extended in this way although verbal changes also play a role. Such expansion on a large scale, with several instances of duplication, has transformed a version with a compact, fast-moving plot not far removed from other versions into an unwieldy and ponderous text which would not have worked well in performance. The general trend in ballad development seems to go in the opposite direction, with a tendency to trim down non-essential material. Alexander Carmichael, if he was the creator - as seems likely - of C.-W.340A, must have been aware of this trend, and his motive in putting together a composite version may have been nothing more than a desire to reconstruct the ballad as it once had been. His methodology in combining versions which are not necessarily compatible,<sup>135</sup> and his

<sup>130</sup> The variation between this and MacPhie's text is small.

<sup>131</sup> C.-W.340B gives this line again. Perhaps Carmichael experimented with the variant in text A and then decided against it.

<sup>132</sup> The absence of this line on C.-W.340A is probably accidental since it reappears in C.-W.340B.

<sup>133</sup> A space for another couplet is left in the manuscript.

<sup>134</sup> Carmichael used a similar technique when editing 'Deirdire'. See A. Bruford: "'Deirdire' and Alexander Carmichael's Treatment of Oral Sources" in: *SGS* 14, Pt.I (Winter1983); pp.4-5.

<sup>135</sup> Matheson's from Kintail, Macphie's from Barra, Donullach's from Skye, Sutherland's from Caithness and Gillies' probably from Perthshire sources.



failure to supply information about the sources of his composite version, while not uncommon in his time, fall short of the demands of modern scholarship.

## Section d: Reciters and Recitation

### Reciters and their sources

Many of the eighteenth century collections do not identify their sources, whether they were drawn from manuscripts or taken down from oral recitation. There are occasional exceptions, as in the case of the anonymous reciter of the *Cath Gabhra* ballad collected by the Rev. John MacKinnon who is described as 'a recruit of the 42nd who had not a word of english.'<sup>136</sup> In other instances collectors give the names of their source reciters but fail to specify the ballads they collected from them, for instance in Duncan Kennedy's second collection where he appends a list of reciters and their place of residence.<sup>137</sup> Kennedy gives the occupation of three of them: John MacLean the strolling beggar from the island of Eigg; Hugh MacCallum, the smith from Belnahua; and the Luing native Niall MacLarty, a fiddler. A note by Kennedy at the end of his list indicates that there were more reciters whose names he could not remember; the note also emphasises that the reciters were 'chiefly old and obscure.' Although MacKinnon's anonymous recruit proves that there was also a generation of younger reciters it appears from the extant evidence that collectors tended to gravitate towards older reciters as the supposed possessors of superior texts, perhaps in response to an innate feature of oral tradition in the Highlands where the greatest respect would have been accorded to the most practised and competent reciters. Kennedy's reciters may have been 'obscure' in terms of social position but matters were quite likely different in terms of their status as tradition bearers. The fiddler and the strolling beggar were probably welcome and well-regarded guests at the *céilidh*-house.

Among the seventeen named reciters in Kennedy's list there is only one woman, Mary Cameron of High Bridge. This would seem to confirm the impression given by the ballad tradition in general that the genre, while not an exclusively male

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<sup>136</sup> Extant in NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.16. and given in the Appendix, Part 2, Scottish Texts section b: Scottish Variant Texts.

<sup>137</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.72.3.10. pp.167-168. Also quoted in *LF*, p.xxi, and Highland Society *Report*, pp.273-274.

preserve, was dominated by male reciters, although it is possible that collectors displayed an unintentional bias towards men because of the heroic associations of the genre. In the nineteenth century, the predominance of male reciters continues, with the exception of Christina Sutherland of Caithness (*Mór anocht mo chumha féin*),<sup>138</sup> Ann Darroch (Fraoch),<sup>139</sup> Mary MacTavish of Islay (*Dearg mac Deirg*),<sup>140</sup> and Ceite Laoruidh of Port Appin (Fraoch).<sup>141</sup>

In the twentieth century, both men and women are in evidence as reciters of ballads but since the tradition is now very much weaker than in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries no further conclusions can be drawn.<sup>142</sup> The attested presence of women as tradition-bearers in Scottish ballad tradition since the second half of the eighteenth century indicates that there was no customary view that material relating to Fionn was unsuitable for female reciters, in contrast to the situation in Ireland where Fionn-material was traditionally an exclusively male preserve.

The collection of ballads made between 1801 and 1808 by the Rev. Dr Irvine of Little Dunkeld provided more information about reciters and their background than usual at the time.<sup>143</sup> The collector followed the common pattern of eighteenth century collecting activity by beginning to collect material while he was a missionary in Rannoch between 1799 and 1805, the time of his admission to Fortingall. Born at Garth, close to Fortingall, in 1772, he probably knew at least some of the tradition-bearers of his native area.<sup>144</sup> This is reflected in the places of residence of most of his informants. The tailor Alexander Cameron lived at Fortingall<sup>145</sup> and the foxhunter Donald MacIver on Loch Tayside.<sup>146</sup> Dalchosnie, near the eastern end of Loch Rannoch, was home to the manservant Archibald Stewart<sup>147</sup> and to John Macdonald whose occupation is not mentioned but who stated that he learned his *Dearg* from Donald Stewart, also from Dalchosnie, in the early 1740s.<sup>148</sup> Charles Robertson, of Loch Tayside gave the information that he learnt some texts from his grandmother,

<sup>138</sup> See Appendix, Part 2, section a: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

<sup>139</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12.

<sup>140</sup> Campbell, *PTWH* 3, pp.60-64.

<sup>141</sup> *LF*, pp.32-33.

<sup>142</sup> J. MacInnes: 'Twentieth-Century Recordings of Scottish Gaelic Heroic Ballads' in: *Heroic Process*; *passim*, esp. pp.101 and 124-130.

<sup>143</sup> Printed in *LF*, *passim*.

<sup>144</sup> Biographical information in H. Scott: *Fasti* vol.4; p.159.

<sup>145</sup> He contributed *Garbh mac Stairn* and *Aithris air Orain nam Fiann*, recorded in 1802.

<sup>146</sup> His ballads were *Deirdre* and *Urnuigh Oisein*, recorded probably in 1802.

<sup>147</sup> *Caoilte agus an Fomhfhear* and *Laoidh Dhiarmaid* were recorded from him in 1801.

<sup>148</sup> He contributed a fragmentary version of the *Dearg* and *Bàs Chonlaoich*, recorded in 1801 and 1804 respectively.

Helen MacLennan, in c.1790.<sup>149</sup> Of Irvine's informants, only a certain MacIntyre of Glenlyon<sup>150</sup> is explicitly described as non-literate although most texts were taken down from oral recitation. It is not clear whether the MacIver whose manuscript was used for the collection<sup>151</sup> is the same individual as Donald MacIver. Where information regarding a reciter's age is available, it appears that Irvine favoured older reciters. John Stewart of Bohaly<sup>152</sup>, described as 'tenant,' was 86 years old at the time of recording and both Cameron's and Macdonald's texts go back to the middle decades of the eighteenth century which would suggest an age of c.70 for those reciters. It is possible that Robertson, whose grandmother was alive in c.1790, belonged to a younger generation of tradition-bearers. Where the reciters' occupations are known, it appears that the foxhunter and the tailor at least would be in a position to move about the countryside to ply their trade and reach a wide audience for their texts, although such mobility is not a prerequisite for a tradition-bearer.

A similar bias towards older reciters is displayed in the Rev. John MacDonald's collection of 1805, where the ages of the reciters range from 50 to 80.<sup>153</sup> Although MacDonald collected several of his ballads from two or more reciters his collection does not indicate individual textual variation. Except for one reciter from Gairloch, MacDonald's informants lived along the North coast between Durness and Thurso, evidencing the continuity of the ballad tradition in that region since the Rev. Alexander Pope's collection of 1739. In the post-Clearances period in the North, there is continuity in the shape of Christina Sutherland's ballads, collected in 1854 by George MacLeod and James Cumming. Born at Forsinard in 1775, she would have been an accomplished reciter at the time of MacDonald's collecting, according to her own testimony which states that she had been learning her extensive repertoire of poetry since early adolescence. Her interest and talent would have been stimulated and nurtured in a home environment which included parents and two brothers who were also competent tradition bearers. Not only did the reciters of the area and their audiences congregate at Christina Sutherland's home, thus providing more opportunity for her to acquire more material, she would also seek out other

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<sup>149</sup> *Urnuigh Oisein*, *Teanntachd Mhór na Féinne*, and *Losgadh Formail* were all recorded in 1808. Helen MacLennan is given as the source of the last two.

<sup>150</sup> Ballads recorded from him include *Mànus* and a Scottish Variant *Cath Gabhra* text but no recording date is given.

<sup>151</sup> The text derived from this source is *Carrachd Rìgh Lochlainn air Fionn*.

<sup>152</sup> His version of the *Muireartach* was recorded in 1808.

<sup>153</sup> A. Cameron: 'Poems of Ossian, Collected by John M'Donald in the Western Parishes of Strathnaver, Ross, and Inverness-shire, in September and October, 1805' in: *TGSI* XIII (1886-1887); pp.269-270.

tradition bearers who had texts not known to her.<sup>154</sup> It is unlikely that Christina Sutherland's example as a reciter is unusual. A transmissional context that involves family members as well as the *céilidh*-house may be assumed for the majority of tradition bearers.<sup>155</sup> In the twentieth century, the evidence for the transmission of *Am Bròn Binn* suggests that the ballad was passed on predominantly in a family context,<sup>156</sup> probably due to the general decline of the *céilidh* tradition.

There appears to be a strong personal aspect in the learning of a text.<sup>157</sup> Many nineteenth century reciters were able to name their sources. A *Cath Gabhra* fragment was collected by Alexander Carmichael in 1861 from Kenneth Morrison of Skye, who states that he derived his ballads from John MacDonald of Talisker, who is described as an 'old man' and as a notable reciter of ballads.<sup>158</sup> Another of Carmichael's informants, Patrick Smith of South Uist, acquired his *Cath Gabhra* fragment of 1869 from Niall Donnullach who died in c.1850 at the age of 75.<sup>159</sup> A further *Cath Gabhra* text, recorded by Carmichael in 1865 from the North Uist reciter Iain Donnullach, derives from a certain Ruairi mac Lemein.<sup>160</sup> Such examples would seem to indicate that reciters were concerned about the accurate preservation of the tradition by authenticating their material in this way. By preserving the 'pedigree' of a text, reciters claim implicitly that their version is as good as that of the source it is derived from. If the source was a well-known tradition bearer, this would lend added prestige to the text.

### The Gillies collection and oral tradition

There are a few instances where a printed text, the Gillies collection, had a reinforcing influence on the ballad tradition of the nineteenth century, as is evident when comparing some ballad versions with the Gillies equivalent.<sup>161</sup> I have not, however, found any references to reciters who learned their text directly from the book; in mid-century, at any rate, copies of the Gillies collection, and other

<sup>154</sup> LF pp.xxxii-xxxiii.

<sup>155</sup> For the interaction between reciter and audience during performance, see R. Finnegan: *Literacy and Orality*; Oxford/New York 1988; pp.77-78. Her arguments would seem to be apt for the context of the *céilidh*-house as well.

<sup>156</sup> Gowans, *Am Bròn Binn*; pp.90-92.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p.92.

<sup>158</sup> Background information in C.-W.244. The text, from NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12, is given in the Appendix, Part 2, Scottish Texts section c: Short and Fragmentary Versions.

<sup>159</sup> The text, from C.-W.7, is given in the Appendix, *ibid*.

<sup>160</sup> The text, from C.-W.105, is given in the Appendix, *ibid*.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. J.F. Campbell's notes on Donald MacPhie's version of *Duan na Ceardaich* in *PTWH* 4, p.405.

publications containing ballads, seem to have been rare in the area of collecting, that is, the Hebrides.<sup>162</sup> Where information is available, Gillies-derived ballads had come to the reciters they were recorded from by oral transmission, and textual differences are consistent with this.

The example of the Barra tradition bearer Donald MacPhie illustrates the transmission of at least four ballads which are closely related to the respective Gillies text. All four texts were recorded in 1860 by J.F. Campbell's collaborator Hector MacLean, who elicited the information that MacPhie learned his texts before c.1830 from his uncle Hector MacLaine, also of Barra, who died around that year at the age of c.80. As MacLaine was non-literate<sup>163</sup> there must be at least one more stage of transmission between the Gillies text and MacLaine's version. He may have acquired it from another, perhaps literate, reciter; or he may have learned it from someone's reading of the text at some point between 1786 and presumably well before 1830. It is perhaps significant that MacPhie is referred to as reciter, not singer, of his ballads, since the book does not specify ballad tunes.<sup>164</sup> Some of MacPhie's ballads are moreover combined with explanatory prose passages which are also likely to indicate recitation rather than singing, for instance his Scottish Variant *Cath Gabhra* text,<sup>165</sup> his version of *Duan na Ceàrdaich*,<sup>166</sup> and his unpublished version of *An Ionmhuinn*.<sup>167</sup> All three ballads are close to the Gillies texts in wording and order of quatrains, and little loss of text has taken place. In MacPhie's 'Praise of Goll,' for instance, two Gillies quatrains are missing but the rest appear in the same order in both texts.<sup>168</sup> In a ballad without a plot to demand a fixed order of quatrains, this indicates a very close relationship. In his *Duan na Ceàrdaich*, a couplet with an indication of a missing second couplet corresponds exactly to the situation in Gillies (q.12). While it may be the collector rather than the reciter who indicated the missing couplet, it is unlikely that the same couplet dropped out of both versions independently.

MacPhie is not alone in having Gillies-derived ballads in his repertoire. Alexander Carmichael collected a version of *Laoidh Fhraoich* from the South Uist

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<sup>162</sup> D.K. Torrie, in a letter of 1861 to J.F. Campbell, quoted in *PTWH* 4, pp.198-202.

<sup>163</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. fol.80.

<sup>164</sup> At any rate, the collector does not seem to provide any description of MacPhie's mode of performance in the sources I have consulted so far. Tunes are specified for some material in the Gillies collection.

<sup>165</sup> *PTWH* 3, pp.320-345.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* pp.396-405.

<sup>167</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. ff.77-80.

<sup>168</sup> *PTWH* 3, pp.310-311. The missing quatrains are 6 and 7.



reciter Eachann MacIosaig, a cottar aged about 89 in 1868.<sup>169</sup> He claims that he heard the ballad at the age of about nine, which would take us back to c.1788, two years or so after the publication of the Gillies collection. Although the time-scale involved is possible the dates become more feasible if we take the figures involved with a grain of salt. The reciter may very well have been older, in his teens maybe, when he learned his version, or Carmichael's estimate of his age may not be exact. Perhaps a date of acquisition in c.1805 might be more appropriate. MacIosaig gives John MacNeil as his source and adds that MacNeil emigrated to Canada long ago.

The Benbecula reciter Donald MacIntyre recited his version of *An Ionmhuinn* to D.K. Torrie in 1861.<sup>170</sup> Six years later, Alexander Carmichael obtained a fragmentary version of the ballad from the same reciter, whom he describes as a Roman Catholic catechist.<sup>171</sup> MacIntyre states that he got his ballad in c.1810 from John MacInnes who lived at the southern end of South Uist. MacInnes emigrated to America in his old age.<sup>172</sup>

Two of the sources of Gillies-derived ballads later emigrated. If it is fair to assume that such emigrants in the first quarter of the nineteenth century would have come from a reasonably well-off sector of society, then it is likely that they also belonged to a class to whom formal education was easily available. If such individuals owned a number of Gaelic books, a copy of the Gillies collection may well have been among them and would have accompanied their owners into emigration but not, apparently, before some ballads had found their way back into oral tradition. On the other hand, it is possible that there was at least one further transmissional stage between the book and either MacInnes' or MacNeil's version, but looking at the likely dates, even if there is some doubt as to their reliability, this is not necessary.

Another Gillies-derived text is extant also in Iain Cameron's version of *An Ionmhuinn* which was collected from the Barra reciter by J.F. Campbell in 1871.<sup>173</sup> As Cameron was only sixty years old at the time, he evidently belonged to a younger group of reciters. Unfortunately, Campbell did not record Cameron's source. In the twentieth century a Gillies-derived text of *Laoidh Fhraoich* is extant, recorded by Calum MacLean from Duncan MacDonald of South Uist, otherwise renowned as a storyteller, in 1953.<sup>174</sup> I am not aware of any information regarding MacDonald's source.

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<sup>169</sup> Text in C.-W.339.

<sup>170</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. ff.118-120.

<sup>171</sup> C.-W.340. Another copy of the fragmentary text by Carmichael is extant in C.-W.114.

<sup>172</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. fol.120.

<sup>173</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.4. ff.97-100.

<sup>174</sup> SA 1953/34/A2.



From the above sample, which does not claim to include all links between the entire corpus of Gillies ballads and versions derived from them in nineteenth century oral tradition, it is clear that a close relationship exists between the printed book and the oral versions referred to above. It is not possible to define that relationship with certainty, since the information provided by the reciters themselves either points to transmission in an oral context or is not clear regarding the circumstances of transmission. The evidence of the Gillies collection itself is not conclusive either. It is possible and, in view of the situation in the eighteenth century, likely that some of the Gillies material derives from oral sources.<sup>175</sup> Much of this, however, would seem to derive from Perthshire sources, not the Hebrides; at any rate, there is not enough Hebridean material extant from the eighteenth century to allow a reliable assessment of this problem. It is not possible to decide in favour of derivation from Gillies or of derivation from shared sources from this angle of view.

Despite the fact that the Rev. James McLagan was closely involved in the compilation of the Gillies material<sup>176</sup> he was not the only contributor of texts. It is possible that multiple versions of ballads were conflated to arrive at the texts that were finally printed, and the occasional use of notes giving alternative words and lines would seem to point in that direction, in at least some instances. A number of texts in the McLagan collection contain textual notes which indicate the presence of other versions; a few may be editorial. It may be that a degree of conflation has already taken place in the production of these manuscripts as we have them now. Some of the McLagan texts in the Gillies collection may be texts which do not represent the exact record of a single reciter's performance - or the exact copy of a single manuscript text - but incorporate a number of features from other source texts as well. The manuscript McLagan 69 was used as the source of several Gillies ballads, for instance the Scottish Variant *Cath Gabhra* text on which Donald MacPhie's version is based.<sup>177</sup> Some minor differences between the manuscript text and the printed one can be explained as printer's errors, e.g. line d of q.60 which is printed as *Gur e surahdom eadh chridh'* runs *Gur e sud a chradh mo chridh'* in the manuscript. There are also differences in order of quatrains: q.28 precedes q.24 in the manuscript and qq.30 and 31 and also qq.47 and 48 appear in reverse order. In these instances the desired position of these quatrains, which is applied in the printed text, is indicated. It is not clear, however, whether we are dealing with a reciter's mistakes,

<sup>175</sup> Cf. also Coventry, op.cit. p.78.

<sup>176</sup> D.S. Thomson: 'The McLagan Manuscripts' p.409 and id. 'A Catalogue and Indexes of the Ossianic Ballads in the McLagan Manuscripts' in: *SGS* 8 (1958), *passim*.

<sup>177</sup> Gillies text quoted in *LF* pp.191-193. For McLagan 69, see Thomson, 'Catalogue and Indexes' pp.200-202.

scribal errors, or an editorial decision based on comparison with another version. A footnote to q.33ab gives an alternative reading which is found in other Scottish Variant texts. Line d of q.63, *Fear co chruidh riut air chul leinn* replaces *Aon fhear ga m rabh cruas do chridh'* in the manuscript but the alternative reading is not given in the printed text. These two examples would seem to indicate that at least one other version of the ballad was known to McLagan. It is possible that the McLagan text has undergone more changes of this kind than the manuscript in its present form shows. There is no information available whether McLagan used oral or manuscript sources in compiling McLagan 69 and no provenance is given for any of the material in it. It is therefore impossible to determine whether MacPhie's version, which consistently follows the Gillies text without taking his footnote material into account, is derived from the same source which yielded the McLagan text or not. Of MacPhie's other Gillies-derived ballads, *An Iomhuinn* and *Duan na Ceàrdaich* do not appear to correspond closely to any extant texts in the McLagan collection. His 'Praise of Goll' is close to Gillies' text, which appears to be derived from McLagan 111, for which again no background information appears to be available.<sup>178</sup> Four ballads that are close to the Gillies texts, which are likely to be drawn from different sources, in the repertoire of one reciter would appear to provide sufficient evidence to argue their derivation from the printed book at a transmissional stage prior to MacPhie's source Hector MacLaine.

More light on the problem of descent from Gillies or derivation from shared sources is shed by the three versions of *An Iomhuinn* recorded from different reciters. While MacPhie and Cameron were both from Barra they need not necessarily have learned their texts from the same immediate source; the third reciter, McIntyre, gives a South Uist source for his text, which has the same number of quatrains as the Gillies one, and with the exception of some minor differences, there is verbatim agreement between the two. At some point in transmission, MacPhie's and Cameron's texts attracted additional quatrains from unrelated versions of the same ballad (MacPhie qq.1-3, Cameron qq.24 and 25). MacPhie's qq.18cd19ab and 26 are intruders from a version of *Cath Rìgh na Sòrcha*, as are Cameron's qq.16-19. Two Macphersonisms in Gillies' text appear to support the view that the three nineteenth century versions descend from Gillies' text. Gillies q.1b mentions *Sealmath*, Macpherson's Selma, and variants of this appear only in the three versions derived from Gillies;<sup>179</sup> the line *leum an t-saighid le sàr bheachd* (Gillies q.16c), likewise paralleled in the other versions, is not in the usual ballad idiom where the

<sup>178</sup> Thomson, *ibid.* p.208.

<sup>179</sup> Another occurrence in a text in C.-W.340 is of no concern here.

death of a ballad protagonist is commonly described by an 'A kills B'-formula, not in the oblique way found in the Gillies text. Such literary influences are likely to be connected with the environment which generated the Gillies collection, and with its educated contributors who had an interest in contemporary literature. A Hebridean source for Gillies' version is much less probable.

The description of the invader (Gillies qq.12-15) illustrates how close the four texts are, while at the same time showing the extent to which development took place in a context of oral transmission. Bold print shows verbal difference, underlining denotes passages from *Cath Rìgh na Sòrcha*, and small capitals indicate lines not represented elsewhere.

Gillies	MacIntyre
12. <i>Choncas am fear mòr uainn</i> <i>Ag teannadh gu cal' as a' chuan,</i> <i>Ag tarruing a luinge gu tìr,</i> <i>Toirt gu 'r 'n ionnsuidh le h-ain-mèin.</i>	12. <i>Chunnacas am fear mor bhuain</i> <b><i>Teachd</i></b> go cala oirn as a chuan <i>Taruinn a luinge go tìr,</i> <i>'S toirt gar n-ionnsuidh le garbh mhin</i>
13. <i>Mar ilbhinn ailbhinn chraige,</i> <i>Mar stuadhan ainmheasach thugainn,</i> <i>'Na chaoiribh teinntidh o chladach,</i> <i>Gu 'm b' e sin coslas a' mhilidh.</i>	13. <i>Mar ilibhiun, ealabhinn nan creag</i> <i>Mar stuaghanan aineasach thugain</i> <i>Na caorai' teantach go cladach</i> <i>Gum be sud coltas a mhil-shith.</i>
14. <i>Bha seuchd do 'n t-sròl bhuidhe mu'n fhear,</i> <i>A cheannbheairt chlochara nèamhain;</i> <i>A lùireach mhòr iursach uallach,</i> <i>'Sa dhá shleagh 'nan cuilg re ghualainn;</i>	14. <i>Bha seic an t-sroll bhuidhe man fhear</i> <i>Cheanabheart Chlogara nimhe</i> <i>Lurach mhor, usgrach, uàllach</i> <i>'Sa dha shleagh nan cuilg ri ghualain</i>
15. <i>A chlaidheamh mòr froiseach neimhneach,</i> <i>Cruaidh cosgara 's e co'-dhìreach:</i> <i>Sgiath innealt, òrbhui', le 'm briste blagh,</i> <i>Air dorn toisgealt' a' mhilidh.</i>	15. <i>Claidheamh mor, froiseach nimhe</i> <i>Cruaidh, cosgara, 's e cho dìreach</i> <i>Sgiath fhionalta, òr-bhuidhe, lùn briste bla[ ]<sup>180</sup></i> <i>Air dorn toisgeal a mhil-shith.</i>

<sup>180</sup> The end of the last word is hidden in the binding of the manuscript.

15. *Chunnacas am fear mor uainn*  
*A teannadh gu cal' as a' chuan,*  
*'S e 'tarruing a luinge gu tir,*  
*'S e 'tighinn g'ar n-ionnsuidh le ana-miann. S a tighin ur n ionse le anamhian*

12. *Chunnachas am fear mòr bhuain*  
*A teannadh gu cala as a chuan*  
*S a tairghin a luinge go tir*

16. *Mar ilbhinn ailbhinn chreige,*  
*Mar stuadhan ainmheasach thugainn,*  
*'Na chaoraibh teintidh o chladach;*  
*Gu'm b' e sin coltas a' mhilidh.*

13. *Mar ilibhin alibhin chreaige*  
*Mar stuadhan anamhiosach thugain*  
*Na chaire teinte bhon chladach*  
*Gu m be siod coltas a mhile*

17. *Bha fèachd de'n t-srol bhuidhe mu'n fhear;* 14. *Bha chladh mhor froseach na dorn.*<sup>182</sup>  
*A cheanna-bheairt chlocharra, nimheil;* *S a channa bheart chochchorra nimhean*  
*A luireach mhor, dhiorasach, uallach;* *A luireach mhor iorrasach uallach*  
*'S a dha shleagh 'nan cuilg ri 'ghualainn.* *S a dha shleadh nan cuilg ri guailleann.*

18. 'S GU'N DEANADH IOMHAIGH AN TREUN LAOICH SOLUS  
 GAD A BHIODH AN IARMAILT GUN AON RIONNAG.

*Bha 'chlaidheamh mor froiseach nach gann* 16. *Bha chluideach mòr froiseach nach gann*  
*Gu teann air taobh an fhir mhoir.* *S teand air taobh an fhir mhoir*

19. *Sgiath leothar nach nochd air n-ais,*  
*'S e 'g iomairt a chleasan corr.*  
*Bha 'chlaidheamh mor, froiseach, nimheach,*  
*Cruaidh, cosgarra, 's e cho direach.*

*Sgia leothar nach nochd air ais*  
*S e g iomairt ga cleasan còr*

15. *Bha chladh mhòr frosneach nimhneach.*  
*Co cholagarbh s e co dhireach.*

20.

*Sgiath innealt, orbhuidh, le'm brisdeadh blad, Sgia' thinneas or bhuidh le bristeadh blaodh*  
*Air dorn toisgeil a' mhilidh.* *Air dorn toisgeal a mhile*<sup>183</sup>

( *Thug e ruathar fir gun gheilt,*  
*'S cha do bheannaich e dh' Fhionn na do'n Fhinn.*)

MacIntyre's text follows the quatrain structure of the Gillies version most closely of the three derivative texts, but would appear to show the greatest number of

<sup>181</sup> Some editorial marks of Campbell's are not represented in the present transcript.

<sup>182</sup> This would appear to be the reciter's error of anticipation.

<sup>183</sup> Campbell divides the previous line after *bhuidh*.

verbal differences. Despite the differences in order of the sword and shield passage the Barra texts are very close. Cameron's version, however, does not preserve MacPhie's q.18ab, which appears to be an example of compensatory innovation, since its presence completes the quatrain structure of the text. It is, however, placed at some distance from the defective Gillies q.17 (corresponding to MacPhie q.21cd) which may indicate an oral origin for the new couplet. Although similar images on the subject of personal beauty can be found, the couplet is not in the ballad idiom and sits rather uneasily in the middle of a sequence describing the hero's weapons. Cameron's version, by contrast, does not contain any compensatory material, although more material derived from a version of *Cath Rìgh na Siorcha* follows q.16 and the presentation of the text in the manuscript gives q.25, part of an acquired sequence comprising qq.24 and 25, as a lone couplet. J.F. Campbell notes the relationship of this version with the Gillies text and indicates the Gillies equivalents in the margin of the manuscript.

## Aspects of recitation

### Singing or recitation

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries much of the ballad material is written down in quatrains. This reflects the fact that the *dán díreach* metres the ballad metres were derived from were quatrain-based and might at first seem to be no more than a learned convention. The quatrain structure of the ballads had, to some extent, mnemonic function because of the connective role of the rhyme scheme. It can be observed that in instances of loss it is more common for couplets and quatrains to drop out than for single lines.<sup>184</sup> It is difficult to determine how closely the quatrain structure of the ballads was observed in performance, since little detailed information is extant from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. There are occasional references to the singing of ballads and twentieth century performances have been recorded.<sup>185</sup> Hector MacLean remarks in his notes to Ann Darroch's fragmentary version of *Laoidh Fhraoich*, recorded in 1859 in Islay, that the ballad used to be sung to children in his youth.<sup>186</sup> Another *Laoidh Fhraoich* fragment collected by Alexander Carmichael in 1861 in Islay from an unnamed woman is

<sup>184</sup> See also chapter 3, section b, sub-section: Patterns of loss and abbreviated material.

<sup>185</sup> MacInnes: 'Twentieth Century Recordings,' *passim*.

<sup>186</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. Printed from NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.10. in J.G. MacKay (ed.): *More West Highland Tales*; Edinburgh/London 1940; pp.114-116.



described by the collector: 'She sang this and sang it most beautifully She had Ossian poems from her husband who has lots of them. She also heard them when a little girl.' No further information regarding this fragment is available.<sup>187</sup> J.F. Campbell's journal for September 12, 1870, records a meeting with a Mull reciter who sang an apparently Gillies-derived version of *Laoidh Fhraoich* to him:<sup>188</sup>

"On coming back found that an old fellow had come four miles by [ ]<sup>189</sup> to repeat a wonderful tale about a beithin that lived in this loch. Made him wait a bit longer as it was dinner time. While dining saw my man walking off. Followed and sat on a hillock and made him repeat *Laoidh Fhraoich*. Eilean Bhain was the Island, Loch Laich the loch, Camus Cridhe was the place where Fraoch died. There in front of us were all those places. He learned the lay and the tune to which he sang it from Gille, mac an leigh. 'He took it from a book and I learned it from him long ago. He was a sgallag I was a herd. I never saw the book but he told me that he took it from the book. My own name is Eoghan Mac Ghille Bhra. The lay is called Fraoch Mac Meadhich.'

The tune I could not catch. It is a queer droning formless kind of rude wild chant. The words so far as I could make out were very like but different in some lines from the lay in Gillies. It seemed to me that there were more verses near the end. In any case this man knows and sings the lay of Fraoch."

Unfortunately, Campbell did not record MacGillivray's text to compare with the Gillies version and we cannot be sure whether the *sgalag* got his text from a copy of the book or a manuscript. If the text was a descendant of the Gillies version, then the tune must have come from a different source, most likely an oral one; this probability remains strong for such a source for the tune if the text originated from a manuscript, since tunes in musical notation were even rarer than the manuscripts themselves and may not have been accessible to a tradition bearer. Campbell's description of the tune appears to characterise the style of twentieth century recordings rather well.<sup>190</sup>

The terminology regarding ballad performance employed by collectors is somewhat ambiguous. 'Recites' and 'repeats' are frequently used to describe a performance and may refer to a performance which did not involve singing. The term

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<sup>187</sup> C.-W.340.

<sup>188</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.2.

<sup>189</sup> An indecipherable word occurs here in the manuscript.

<sup>190</sup> I am not, however, qualified to comment on the musicological significance of sung ballad performance.



'reciter' may also have been perceived as appropriate to a performer who employed the distinctive monotonous singing style that has been recorded in the twentieth century, for example the version of *Duan na Ceàrdaich* recorded from Marion Campbell of South Uist in 1967.<sup>191</sup> The Gaelic term *seanchaidh*, used by Alexander Carmichael in many of his manuscripts, does not shed any further light on the matter.

Some nineteenth century texts show features that would be consistent with a sung performance. A version of *Am Bròn Binn* collected from an unnamed reciter by Donald MacPherson between 1857 and 1872 at Lochalsh contains two lines of a vocable refrain that alternate between ballad lines.<sup>192</sup> Another version of the ballad was recorded with its tune in North Uist by Frances Tolmie in 1871, probably from Harriet MacVicar; the chorus of this text consists of a vocable refrain which differs from MacPherson's.<sup>193</sup> *Am Bròn Binn* has been recorded from various singers in the twentieth century, both with and without a chorus.<sup>194</sup> A vocable refrain would seem to be a certain indicator of singing, even for texts where the tune has not been noted. This type of chorus is strongly associated with the genre of waulking songs and some ballads have been absorbed into this genre, e.g. *Laoidh a' Choin Duibh*.<sup>195</sup> *Duan na Ceàrdaich* became attached to the corpus of *Duain Challainn*, performed by the Hogmanay guisers; unusually for the *Duain Challainn*, the ballad was sung rather than recited.<sup>196</sup> The Islay reciter Mary MacTavish had a fragmentary version of *Laoidh Fhraoich* which was recorded by J.F. Campbell probably in 1859.<sup>197</sup> This text, although no tune is noted down for it, uses linked couplets; the reciter stated that she learned the ballad from a ploughman in c.1800 who used to sing to accompany his work; although the reference in the reciter's statement is to songs rather than ballads it is likely that a text of this kind was sung rather than recited. In the case of the above ballads, however, other versions are extant which show none of the above specialisations and are likely to have been recited.

### Clarity

There are indications that reciters were keen to make sure that their audience did not lose the thread of the plot during recitation. In a genre that was apt to require

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<sup>191</sup> SA 1967/139/7.

<sup>192</sup> Gowans, op.cit. p.12. The text is printed in *LF* p.208.

<sup>193</sup> Gowans, op.cit. pp.11-12.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. pp.12-15. More references to earlier sung versions are found throughout Gowans' Chapter 1.

<sup>195</sup> MacInnes: 'Twentieth Century Recordings...' p.127.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. p.108.

<sup>197</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12.

obscure phrases as the result of transmissional processes or, in some cases, the survival of obsolescent forms, this is a natural concern. Introductory passages in prose which either summarise the plot or give background information have been recorded in a number of instances.; e.g. in a short Scottish Variant *Cath Gabhra* text recorded in 1869 by Alexander Carmichael from the South Uist reciter Patrick Smith:<sup>198</sup>

*Dealbh agus aobhar na laoi -*

*Bha Oscar no Osgar na oganach<sup>199</sup> fuasach laidir agus cha robh doip mharbhaidh eir ach an aon doigh. Bha toil aig Coirbre Ruadh mac Righ Eirinn a mharbhadh agus thug e eir a phiuthar fhein a phosadh los gum faigheadh i mach fios eir an seol marbhaidh a tha eir. Rinn i seo - phos nighean Righ Eirinn Osgar agus mar a bhios na mnathann a diurais ris na fir fhuair e mach o Osgar bu de bu sheol marbhaidh dha. Thainig an Coirbe Ruadh am foil eir a phiuthar agus faighear a mach uaipe seo. "Chan eil seol marbaidh orms ars an t-Osgar aluin ach le m shleaigh fhein agus chan eil neach is urrain a h-oibreachadh gus am fas i geal." Chuala Coirbre seo. Togar ceardach fo n talamh agus shir agus fhuair e iomlaid shleagh bha n Osgar a cur am fiacha gu'n ro e dol a thoirst blar do dhuthaich nam Fear mora.*

*Thug Osgar a shleagh do Choirbre d uair bha e dol a chath ri fear eile. Chuir Cairbi an t-sleagh sin fios eir Osgar gu cath. Thainig Osgar. Ruith Coirbre mach le sleagh Osgair agus i geal le teas agus sheol e i troimh chorp Osgair.*

It is not usually made clear in the extant manuscripts whether the identification of speakers in some texts in order to add clarity was provided by the reciters or whether they were the contribution of collectors. On occasion, reciters added their own comments to their texts to provide clarification. The presence of such additional material would also appear to be linked to a reciter's role as preserver of the tradition: the provision of additional information underlines the importance of the text, whether as history or *seanchas*, and may ensure its further survival by clarifying certain points. On a different level, such comments indicate the reciters' enthusiasm for, and involvement with, their material. A similar attitude is displayed by

<sup>198</sup> The entire text is extant in C.-W.7. For introductory prose passages, see also chapter 1, section d, sub-section: Prose and the oral context (Introductions and 'arguments').

<sup>199</sup> These two words in superscript.

one of the Rev. Alexander Pope's informants who used to remove his bonnet when singing *Laoidh Dhiarmaid* out of respect for the hero.<sup>200</sup> Other eighteenth century tradition bearers are emphatic in asserting the historicity of the events told in the ballads, Oisean's authorship, and the distinctiveness and high quality of his compositions, for instance the North Uist man Hugh MacDonald.<sup>201</sup>

### Textual stability

In a few instances, recordings of different performances of the same reciter exist. Generally, a high degree of textual stability can be observed and most of the changes involve equivalent words. Omissions can be observed in some cases. Some collectors, Alexander Carmichael for instance, made reciters repeat their performance immediately after writing the text down as a means of checking the recording's accuracy and usually comment that no significant changes took place. Two transcriptions by Carmichael exist of two performances of *Macabh mor Mac Righ na Sorcha* (*Cath Righ na Sorcha*) by the South Uist reciter Patrick Smith, one dating to 1860, the other from 1869. Smith was about seventy years of age at the time of the second recording.<sup>202</sup> Throughout the text minor verbal differences occur which, however, do not affect the plot or even the meaning of the affected lines. Each text shows omissions when compared to the other; these usually involve couplets and the missing material is not essential to the plot. The following passage from NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. demonstrates the amount of variation that occurs; bold print indicates the differences to C.-W.7:

4.     *B'ionnan **dearsadh** di 's do'n ghrein;                   **dealradh***  
        *Bu leoir a meinn anns gach dealbh.*  
        ***Bhean ur a thainig oirnn an cein***  
        ***Bha sinn gu leir roimpe soirbh***
  
5.     *Dh'imich i gu pobull Fhinn,*  
        *'S bheannaich i gu grinn **dò**                               **doigh***  
        *Fhreagair Mac Chumhail o Threunmor*  
        *Le **ghuth bhinn**, gu mìn, 's gu fòil.                   **gu bhinn** (scored out) **o thuim***

<sup>200</sup> Highland Society Report (Appendix); pp.54-55.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. pp.38-44.

<sup>202</sup> The earlier text is extant in NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. ff.66-72, the second one in C.-W.7.

6. *Dh' fharraid an rìgh bu ro ghlan fìos,* (slios?)  
*"Ceud failt a nighean ghlan ur!"* *nan ciabh or*  
*Am misde sinn fhoighneachd a nis;*  
*Na co'n treubh o'n d'thainig thu?"* *'Ne siod am fear a th'eir a thus? thoir?*
7. *"Mise nighean Rìgh Fo Thuinn;*  
*Dh'innsinn duit a rìgh mo dhàil;-* *dhan*  
*Cha robh sgìr' mu'n iadh a' ghrian* *sgriobh*  
*Nach d'iarr mi dhuibhs' o Flaith Phàil.* *a Bhlaì-fhail*

Q.4cd is only found in C.-W.7, clearly an accidental omission. It is obvious that the verbal changes in the passage do not change the meaning significantly; in most cases the differing items are close in sound and fit into the rhyme scheme where this is required. A significant proportion of the differences involves material belonging to the Heroic Code (4a, 5c, 6a and b, 7d) which may indicate that material with a formulaic dimension was more prone to variation than other parts of the text. Q.6d makes an error of anticipation in C.-W.7 and belongs to another dialogue between Fionn and the lady later in the ballad. On the whole, the balance between the changed words and the stable passages demonstrates how far a competent reciter is able to make use of the in-built flexibility of the genre.

### **Chapter 3: Patterns of Transmission and Development**

A predominantly scribal context offers a relatively stable environment for the transmission of texts. Factors such as scribal error and imperfect exemplars make for a certain amount of textual variation but such instances are not difficult to pinpoint by comparison with other texts. The influence of scribal creativity, or of material drawn from an oral context, is less easy to determine; there may also be areas of overlap between accidental and intentional variation in some instances.<sup>1</sup>

The oral context which is important for much of the Scottish ballad tradition presents a different set of circumstances for textual transmission. Variation plays a much larger role in the oral environment although the stabilising influence of written texts is evident in some cases.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally, textual changes cannot be explained with the help of the available evidence; in other cases, patterns of textual development can be observed which illustrate the extent to which change can take place in an oral environment as well as the mechanisms which underlie the patterns. Such changes affect texts at different levels: at the level of plot and plot episode, at the level of metrical unit or single line, and at the level of phrase or individual word. Many instances of loss, change or intact survival of ballad material can be put into their proper perspective with the help of the transmissional patterns analysed in the present chapter.

#### **Section a: Location, Verisimilitude, and Ballads that 'Go Native'**

The use of place names plays an important role in the creation of an atmosphere of realism in the ballads. Some names are predominantly associated in literature in general with specific protagonists; e.g. *Almhain*, the Hill of Allen, is frequently mentioned as Fionn's main residence, the seat of Cormac mac Airt is Tara, and Cú Chulainn is usually associated with Dundalk. The prestigious *dindshenchas* material has contributed some place names to the ballads, a practice probably in part designed to add

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 2, section b, sub-section: The Irish scribal tradition.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 2, section d, sub-section: the Gillies collection and oral tradition.

to a ballad's status - significant things happen at significant places - and partly intended to show off the composer's learning.

As the majority of these place names belongs to Ireland, changes are to be expected in later Scottish tradition after the reinforcing role of professional learned men ceased to be relevant; later Irish tradition appears to have been less susceptible to such change because of the greater availability of material derived from the learned context. Most Highland tradition bearers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are likely to have been aware of the strong Irish links of Fionn-material in general although they would also have been in a position to appreciate the fact that certain Fionn-traditions had a specifically Scottish dimension. *Laoidh Dhiarmaid*, for instance, has Glen Shee as its location, and both Tomnahurich near Inverness and Glenorchy were believed to be places where Fionn and his followers rest.<sup>3</sup>

Various place names, referring to topographical features rather than settlements, reinforce the impression that Fionn and his warriors were perceived to have significant links with the Highlands. There is *Àite Suidhe Finn*, near Portree, mentioned in the Old Statistical Account;<sup>4</sup> Glencoe has *Sgòrr nam Fiannaidh* and Ossian's Cave;<sup>5</sup> and Loch Ossian and the River Ossian are located south-east of Loch Tréig.<sup>6</sup>

### Irish place names

Some Irish place names in ballads survive with a fair degree of accuracy. Ireland herself is mentioned frequently and Tara, *Teamhair* or *Teamhra* in the texts, is preserved for instance in Campbell of Portree's version of the Dearg which also contains a reference to Ireland in the form of *Innis-fail*.<sup>7</sup> *Eas Ruaidh* appears unchanged in many versions of the ballad *Eas Ruaidh*; e.g. in McLagan 69.<sup>8</sup> Other place names undergo change when a ballad occurs in a Scottish context. A frequent example is the

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<sup>3</sup> Campbell: *The Fians*; pp.3-4.

<sup>4</sup> D.J. Withrington and I.R. Grant (eds.): *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-1799*, vol.10; Wakefield 1983; p.184. The entry for Portree parish was compiled by the ballad collector Alexander Campbell who became minister of the parish.

<sup>5</sup> P. Drummond: *Scottish Hill and Mountain Names*; Scottish Mountaineering Trust 1991; p.190, has more examples of hill names connected to Fionn and the *Fian*. For Ossian's Cave, see R. Smith: 'A Walk on the Wild Side' in P. Reekie (ed.): *Heritage Scotland* vol.14, no 1 (Spring 1997); p.26.

<sup>6</sup> I have not investigated any explanatory traditions that are likely to be attached to these and other place names of the same kind.

<sup>7</sup> *Rel.Celt.* I; pp.202-207.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp.332-336.



transposition of Fionn's residence from *Almhainn* to Scotland, especially in phrases like the location-cheville *Fionn Almhainn/Albann*, as in Campbell's version of the *Dearg* where Fionn appears as *Fionn a Alabain*. This particular instance may only have required a slip of the tongue but once made it is easy to see why a concept that was corroborated by other strands of tradition continued in use. It is, however, likely that most tradition-bearers would not have lost sight of the fact that Fionn was also significantly linked to Ireland.

### *Duan na Ceàrdaich*

A different situation applies to the place name *Luachair Deadhadh* where the action of *Duan na Ceàrdaich* begins in Irish versions.<sup>9</sup> Dedad is a character familiar in *dindshenchas* and is mentioned in the entry on *Teamhair Luachra*<sup>10</sup> although it is likely that he would have been obscure in a Scottish context, particularly among the reciters of later ballad tradition. It is thus not surprising that Scottish texts begin with several variants of *Latha dhuinn air luachair leothaid*.<sup>11</sup> This would appear to represent not a specific place name but a topographical image; this particular version translates roughly as 'sloping rushy place' and a variant *luachar leobhar*, 'awkwardly shaped rushy place,' exists. The obscure personal name has been replaced by words that further describe a particular kind of place which audiences would be able to recognise or visualise. The text moves from an environment of verisimilitude that is based on a place-name with pseudo-historical associations to one that is less specific in terms of history but more relevant in describing a realistic location. The string of Irish place names which map the route taken by Lon mac Líomhtha from *Lúachair Deadhadh* to the Cave of Corann (DF qq.21-27) has given way to a general description of a traverse of rough hill ground in the corresponding LF passage (qq.10-14) although the Irish connection is maintained in an explicit reference to the province of Munster in q.10b. Phrases like *ri beannaibh dubha 'n t-sléibhe* (q.12b), *Air gach gleann faoin romh fhàsach* (q.13b), and *A tearnadh air alltan a' chuimir, / A dìreadh ri bealach nam faobhar* (q.14ab) are apt to recall actual locations in the listener's mind and for that reason are more memorable than mere place

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<sup>9</sup> DF II; pp.3-4. Other appearances in ballads are listed in DF III; pp.403-404.

<sup>10</sup> Gwynn: *Metr. Dinds.* III; pp.236-239.

<sup>11</sup> LF; pp.65 and 67.

names that do not link up to local ones. The Scottish texts achieve verisimilitude by replacing specific place names with general but adaptable images.

### *Laoidh Fhraoich*

*Laoidh Fhraoich* has undergone a rather different process of adaptation to Scottish conditions. Although many versions preserve Irish place names such as *Cluain Fraoich*, *Carn Fraoich*, and *Loch Maidhe* it is very likely that the original Connacht connection of the ballad had been long forgotten in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The element *fraoch*, 'heather,' must have helped in the preservation of the first two place names because locations suitable to bear such names are almost ubiquitous in the Highlands.<sup>12</sup> *Laoidh Fhraoich* is remarkable for the way in which it became localised in various parts of the Highlands. Loch Freuchie near Amulree in Perthshire is the scene of the ballad in the version in the Gillies collection.<sup>13</sup> A later commentator corroborates this and adds details:<sup>14</sup>

'The small island in Loch Freuchie is said by the natives to have been the scene of the terrible and deadly fight between the hero Fraoch and the wild beast which had its lair in the island. Fraoch, according to the Glenquaich version of the tale, had his home at Croit-nam-fiodhag, on the north side of the loch, and Mai's home was Caisteal-dubh-nan-cro, about three quarters of a mile south-east from the island. Caisteal-dubh-nan-cro was built on a knowe not much more than a stone throw from the U.F. Church of the Glen, and on the south side of the public road. It is evident that there was a circular building on the knowe, and it measures some twenty yards in diameter. Jerome Stone wrote down, in the eighteenth century, the Glenquaich version of the Gaelic poem commemorating the love, bravery, and death of Fraoch, but I am aware that an island in Loch Awe is also said to have been the scene of Fraoch's tragic death, and there may be other islands for which a similar claim is advanced.'

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion of the place name material in the ballad see Meek: '*Táin Bó Fraích*' Pt.1, pp.10-15, esp. note 36, and *HC*, notes to BDL XXVII, section ii (2).

<sup>13</sup> *LF* pp.31-32.

<sup>14</sup> J. Macdiarmaid: 'More Fragments of Breadalbane Folklore' in: *TGSI* 26 (1904-1907); p.49.

Disregarding the uncorroborated claim that Stone's version of the ballad was collected in Glenquaich, the passage illustrates the extent to which the ballad had become attached to suitable features of the landscape, including something that appears to be a prehistoric structure.

A text collected by Alexander Carmichael from the Appin reciter Ceite Laoruidh in 1862 locates the ballad in the Rannoch area.<sup>15</sup> Mull tradition claims the location for the events narrated in the ballad as well and J.F. Campbell encountered a reciter who knew the text as late as 1872.<sup>16</sup> This is corroborated by the introduction to an edition of Stone's text which also mentions a parallel Loch Awe tradition which located the scene of the ballad there:<sup>17</sup>

'The events narrated in the following poem occurred in Mull, in the district surrounding Loch Laich, which is probably a corruption of Loch Maidhe. - The lake of Mev -; the local tradition is that Fraoch lived at Suidhe near the village of Buinessan. Opposite him in an oblique direction on the other side of the loch lived Mev, through whose treachery Fraoch was slain; the place is still known as *larach tigh Meidhe*. It is close to the farm of Ard-fenaig.

Mev's only child was Main, a girl of exquisite grace and beauty. The island where the rowan tree grew is called after her Eilean Mhain (the isle of Main). It is right opposite to Buinessan. (...)

The pitiful story of Fraoch's death is known all over the Highlands, and is very ancient. It is therefore not surprising that it has been assigned to other localities than the true one. The most popular of these is Loch-Awe. Specious arguments have been framed to support the claim of that place: but the only evidence in favour of it is the word *Cruachan* which occurs in the third verse of the poem. This word is taken by the people of Loch-Awe to mean Ben Cruachan but the translation we have given effectually dissipates that myth.'

While this example of Mull patriotism quotes a number of local place names in support of the tradition it is also useful in demonstrating how an existing place name, in this case Ben Cruachan, can aid the localisation of a ballad. As in the Glenquaich

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp.32-33.

<sup>16</sup> See chapter 2, section d, sub-section: Aspects of recitation (singing or recitation).

<sup>17</sup> J. MacCormick and W. Muir: *The Death of Fraoch*; Iona 1887; p.1.

tradition, the precise locations of the protagonists' dwellings are pointed out in support of the matter. A twentieth century prose version of the story of Fraoch also located events near Bunessan in Mull.<sup>18</sup>

Various other sources exist which mention Loch Awe as the scene of the ballad. Thomas Pennant summarises the ballad in 1769 and his account was used by the Rev. Joseph Macintyre in his entry in the Old Statistical Account.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that Pennant refers to a poem while Macintyre mentions a tale; it appears that within thirty years the ballad had developed into a prose text, perhaps similar to that collected from Ceite Laoruidh in 1862. From an English poem by P.G. Hamerton it is apparent that the tradition of Fraoch's death was still known in the Loch Awe area in the middle of the nineteenth century, although the author, who was probably not a Gaelic speaker, does not indicate where he got his source material or whether his model was in prose or verse.<sup>20</sup> From the strength of the tradition in the areas where the ballad became localised it is easy to see that the text, either as a ballad or in prose forms derived from the ballad, was extremely popular. From the same evidence it is also clear that the claims of each area to the possession of the location of events were defended fervently if competing claims were made by other districts.

## Section b: Patterns of Innovation

In order to determine the extent to which variation takes place between different versions of the same ballad it is at first necessary to select a version which serves as a 'standard' for comparison. A complete plot is a prerequisite and usually one of the earlier texts will be most useful; it is not always practicable to choose the oldest available text as this may be too far removed from the later versions.

When corresponding innovative features are present in different texts they are useful in identifying groups of related versions; characteristics that are peculiar to one

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<sup>18</sup> J. MacInnes: *Sgeul mu Fhraoch*; leaflet accompanying School of Scottish Studies disc 'Scottish Gaelic Folktales'; no date; pp.2-4.

<sup>19</sup> T. Pennant: *A Tour in Scotland*; MDCCLXIX; Perth 1979 (reprint of the third edition of 1774); p.217 and Withrington and Grant: op.cit. vol.8; pp.120-121.

<sup>20</sup> P.G. Hamerton: *The Isles of Loch Awe*; London 1858; pp.15-26. The poem is not translated from the original Gaelic but represents a thorough reworking of the tradition.

version are important in illustrating the variety of textual development that can take place in an oral environment. In view of the limitations of the extant material there is again a certain risk in generalising although certain patterns recur in several versions of different ballads. While thus not universally applicable, such patterns suggest explanations as to why certain changes have taken place in a given text. They can also shed light on some of the mechanisms that are involved in oral transmission. The essential fluidity of texts in an oral environment is reflected in the extent to which change can take place and in the flexibility of the patterns that emerge from the study of the texts.

## Accretion

### The Death of Diarmaid

An example of material that has entered a ballad from another ballad with a closely connected theme is found in two texts relating to the death of Diarmaid. The Irish text *Tabhair éin-digh dhamh-sa, a Fhinn* shows a direct textual relationship with some of the later Scottish relatives of BDL XIII, *Gleann Síodh an gleann so rém thaoibh*. Fionn's answer to Diarmaid's initial request in the Irish text (q.2) is paralleled by q.21 of the Gillies collection.<sup>21</sup>

*Tabhair... q.2*

*Créad fá dtiubhrainn[-se] digh dhuit*

*créad fá bhfóirfinn do dheacair*

*Is nach ndearnais riamh mo leas*

*nach dearnais 'na dhiaidh m'aimhleas? 'S is mor a rinn thu do m' aimhleas.*

*Gillies q.21*

*Cha toir mise dhuit deoch*

*'S cha mho choisgeas mi air h-iota,*

*O 'S beag a rin thu do m' leas*

The fact that the Gillies quatrain is in vernacular Scottish Gaelic suggests that this quatrain had been present in Scottish texts for some time although its earliest appearance in the extant material is only in the MacNicol collection of c.1755.<sup>22</sup> This implies that the Irish text is older than the extant manuscript which dates to the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ó Siochfhradha: *Laoithe na Féinne*; pp.275-276 and LF pp.162-163 respectively.

<sup>22</sup> LF; p158.

<sup>23</sup> RIA 23 O 35, written between 1772 and 1778. Ó Siochfhradha lists his sources on p.316.

A larger amount of shared material is found in Kennedy's first collection.<sup>24</sup>

*Tabhair q.2*

*Créad fá dtiubhrainn[-se] digh dhuit  
créad fá bhfóirfinn do dheacair  
is nach ndearnais riamh mo leas  
nach dearnais 'na dhiaidh m'aimhleas?*

*q.3cd*

*an tan do bhí an Déid-gheal dod ghoin  
is tú i n-éigean gabhaidh.*

*q.4cd*

*do thréigeas mórán dem fhuil  
digh den fhuaran damh tabhuir.*

*q.6ab*

*I mBruidhin Chaorthainn is tú ar láimh  
ba mhaith duit mo theagmháil*

*q.8*

*Is mé dalta Aongais an Bhrogha  
do bheireadh rogha an urchair;  
do mharbhainn fear re fogha  
truagh m'oidheadh ar Bhinn Gholbain.*

*q.9*

*Cuimhin liom lá i gCeis Chorrainn  
Cairbre romhainn 's a mhuintir;  
Fionn 's an Fhiann 'na dhiaidh  
truagh m'oidheadh ar Bhinn Gholbain.*

*Kennedy q.32*

*De cha tabhair mi dhuit deoch,  
A choisgeas do ghoi' no d' iota;  
'S nach d' rinn thu dhamh riamh do 'm leas,  
Nach d' rinn thu faidhoidh do 'm mhi-leas.*

*q.39cd*

*'N uair a bha 'n Deud-gheal, gu d' ghuin  
'S tu ann an eigainn san d' éug-bhail.*

*q.31cd*

*O 'n dhoirt mi moran do 'm fhuil,  
Thoir deoch as an fhuaran chugam.*

*q.39ab*

*Am bruth chaorainn bha thu 'n láimh,  
O! Fhinn bu mhaith dhuit mi feinach;*

*q.51*

*'S mi dalt Aondhais a Bhrodha,  
Bheirainn todhaidh do gach ur 'chair;  
Thug barr air gach fear le fádhaid,  
O! struagh 'm ádhaidh gu Beinn-ghulbann.*

*q.48*

*Nam bu chumhain leat la Chonaill  
Bha Cairbnidh roimhad sa mhuintir;  
Thu fèin is an Fhiann ai d' dheidh,  
O! 's truagh 'm ádhaidh gu Beinn-ghulbann.*

<sup>24</sup> LE; pp158-161. The relevant passage includes qq.31-52 on pp.159-160.



q.13cd

*Do thréig mé mo ghal 's mo ghaisceadh<sup>25</sup>*  
*Tabhair dom dìgh feasta nó ná tabhair.*

q.46cd

*O 'n chaill mi mo bhri' 's mo bhlagh,*  
*Deoch do 'n fhuaran, neo' na tabhair.*

In Kennedy's text, the incident has been worked up into a longer dialogue which repeats the initial exchange between Diarmaid and Fionn (qq.31-32) before each new episode in which Diarmaid reminds Fionn of his deeds is introduced; some of these quatrains (42 and 45) appear to be linked to a version of the Romantic tale.<sup>26</sup> The quatrains shared with the Irish ballad show clearly that they were drawn from a vernacular Scottish Gaelic context before they were incorporated into Kennedy's version. It is also worth noting that the quatrains appear in a different order in Kennedy's version and that in some instances only couplets were used together with new complementary couplets; both facts together would seem to imply either an oral context or, perhaps more likely, conscious adaptation. It seems reasonable to suggest that a version of *Tabhair éin-dìgh dhomh-sa, a Fhinn*, or at least parts of it, were current in Scotland before the second half of the eighteenth century, perhaps in an oral rather than a scribal context. Except for the quatrain paralleled in other Scottish versions, Kennedy may have incorporated the above quatrains into his texts himself; alternatively, he may have encountered a text which already contained them when he compiled his version. The fact that the exchange between Diarmaid and Fionn is repeated five times may indicate an oral context; it is also possible that the quatrains telling of Diarmaid's deeds have been expanded in this way by Kennedy himself.<sup>27</sup>

### Banner quatrains

In a solely Scottish context, we encounter a sequence of quatrains describing the banners of the Fian; its earliest appearance is in BDL XVI, *Naoinear a chuadhmar fá choill*, a text which does not appear to be extant in later tradition. The banner quatrains, however, survive into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and occur either independently, or incorporated into versions of *Mànus*, or - occasionally - as part of

<sup>25</sup> Alternatively: *mo ghaisce is mo ghoil do thréigeas*.

<sup>26</sup> Meek: 'Death of Diarmaid...' pp.347-348.

<sup>27</sup> The sources and factors that contributed to the genesis of Kennedy's texts in general are in need of a new evaluation but cannot be investigated here. See also chapter 6, section b: *Innis dúinne a Fhearghuis*.

*Teanntachd Mhór na Féinne*.<sup>28</sup> The Eriskay versions of the Dearg contain an abbreviated banner sequence; one text was collected in 1866 by Alexander Carmichael in Eriskay from John MacInnes and the other dates to the time between 1887 and 1893 and was collected by Fr. Allan McDonald from an unnamed reciter in South Uist or Eriskay.<sup>29</sup> The banner sequence in Carmichael's text runs as follows (ll.126-132 of the copy in C.-W.113); Fr. Allan's version agrees with this:

*Thog sinn amach a sin a chum Dòrain*  
*Bratach Fhearghuis mo bhrathar*  
*Thug sinn a mach an Lia-luineach*  
*Bratach le Diarmad O Duine*  
*Thug sinn a mach mo bhratach fhein ais Oisein*  
*'S a solust mar ghrein an duibhre*<sup>30</sup>

Diarmaid's banner, *an Lia-luineach* has recognisable parallels elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> Fearghus' banner, *a chum Dòrain*, is less easy to match unless it is connected with *dh' fhulang d'oghrainn*, the name of Fearghus' banner in the version of *Mànus* in the Kennedy collections (q.48ab); Kennedy's second collection has *Dorainn*.<sup>32</sup> The description of Oisean's own banner does not agree with its parallels in BDL XVI, *Dún Naomhtha*, or a version of *Mànus* in McLagan 227 where it appears as *Duthnimh*.<sup>33</sup> It bears, however, some resemblance to Kennedy's versions which both have *Thogadh suas mo bhratach fein/ A shoillse mar a ghrein an dúibhre* (q.49ab).<sup>34</sup> The two quatrains in

<sup>28</sup> As discussed by D.E. Meek: 'The Banners of the Fian in Gaelic Ballad Tradition' in: *CMCS* 11 (Summer 1986); pp.34-46. Unpublished nineteenth century versions of independent banner quatrains are extant in NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. and C.-W.114 but I have not yet been able to consult them.

<sup>29</sup> Carmichael's version is extant in two copies, one of them problematic, in C.-W.113 and C.-W.358; Fr. Allan's text is found in C.-W.263.

<sup>30</sup> Carmichael's line divisions have been adjusted to correspond to other versions of the banner quatrains. The sequence corresponds closely to that in its parent version in the MacCallum collection but has lost a reference to Caoilte's banner. See H. and J. MacCallum (eds.): *An Original Collection of the Poems of Ossian, Orran, Ulin, and other Bards who flourished in the same age. Collected and edited by Hugh and John MacCallum*; Montrose 1816, p.100. See also this section, sub-section: Complementary, compensatory, and elaborative innovation (compensatory innovation: the Eriskay Variant of the Dearg).

<sup>31</sup> Meek, op.cit. pp.42-43.

<sup>32</sup> *LF* p.76.

<sup>33</sup> Meek, *ibid*.

<sup>34</sup> *LF* p.76.

Kennedy's version of *Mànus* do not appear to be part of the mainstream tradition of the banner quatrains but since they are apparently represented by related lines in the Eriskay Dearg they are likely to have been more common than extant examples suggest.<sup>35</sup>

Banners play a small role in some other Scottish versions of the Dearg. The Ardchonaill manuscript, written between 1690 and 1691 by Eoghan MacGhilleoin, has *Ni huarfideadh dhiobh meirg aon fhir* (q.29c), *Thog a meirg nochair tim/ Le fearg moir do chum an chomhlain* (q.37cd), and *Eirghus Faolan le fearg mor/ Ghlac a mearg tshaorthadh shroil* (q.53ab).<sup>36</sup> It seems doubtful, however, that these general references to banners provided the inspiration for the incorporation of the banner sequence in the Eriskay texts. To begin with, few later versions of the Dearg preserve the above lines intact; even in the Faolan-couplet, the stabilising influence of the rhyme *fearg : mearg* does not prevent the banner's disappearance; as in the equivalent lines in the Eriskay text: *Dh eirich Faolan le feirg mhoir/ S thug e guth o's cionn an t-sloigh* (ll.167-168). It is worth noting that two of the banner references apply to the Dearg himself; a transference of context from the Dearg's banners to the *Fian*'s banners appears to be unlikely. Faolan, although the owner of a banner named *Coinneal Chatha* in BDL XVI (q.22), is not present in the banner quatrains in later tradition. There is also the matter of terminology: the banner references all use *meirge* while the banner quatrains have *bratach*. It seems reasonable to leave the banner references which include *meirge* in the category of optional heroic equipment and seek the inspiration for the inclusion of the banner quatrains in their own peculiarities. They are found as a ready-made independent unit which enjoyed considerable popularity. They also appear as a sequence in certain other invader ballads. Their obvious adaptability is very likely to have been a contributory factor in their incorporation into the Eriskay variant of the Dearg, particularly since we are dealing with another invader-ballad with a plot that provided a highly suitable context for their inclusion.<sup>37</sup>

The process of accretion can be viewed from a number of additional angles. The above examples could also be regarded as instances of elaborative innovation since they

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<sup>35</sup> It is impossible to determine at this point whether the presence of the banner quatrains in the MacCallum text goes back to an oral source or whether it is the result of editorial activity.

<sup>36</sup> As in the original manuscript, NLS.Adv.MS.73.1.36. A transcript in *LF*, pp.121-123, is rather unreliable.

<sup>37</sup> Meek, op.cit. p.39, points out the flexible nature of the banner quatrains and emphasises the strong Viking links of the later ballads that incorporate banner sequences.

provide information which supplements aspects of the original plot.<sup>38</sup> Single quatrains that attach themselves to different ballads may be regarded as 'floating quatrains;' there are also motifs or episodes that recur in different contexts.<sup>39</sup>

The role of accretion in an environment of oral transmission would appear to be connected to reciters' desire to maintain a text in good condition. This does not necessarily apply to defective or poorly preserved texts only, as in the case of the Eriskay Dearg where the plot structure loses much of its original clarity in its later passages. The example of the Diarmaid-ballads involves texts that are generally in a good state of preservation; the new material here involves incidental detail which heightens the tension of the plot.<sup>40</sup>

### **Complementary, compensatory, and elaborative innovation**

It seems reasonable to suggest that most instances that involve innovation in the shape of accretion are intentional rather than accidental although it is difficult to form a final opinion of the process by judging its result. Certain types of accretion, usually on a relatively small scale, can be shown to fulfil specific functions with regard to the maintenance of a texts. Some of these innovations aim to compensate for lost material, others try to complement real or perceived imperfections that are not the result of textual loss, and some instances elaborate on certain details already present in the text. In distinction to the new material discussed above, these three types of innovation normally involve passages that are composed specifically for the task they are intended to fulfil. To some extent, these distinctions are artificial and it is unlikely that those who implemented such innovation would have made a distinction between compensatory and complementary material.

Their main motivation is likely to have been a desire to improve on a text which they considered to be defective. While they would perhaps have had access to a limited number of variant versions of a given ballad these variants may not have provided the detail needed to restore an imperfect text to its former state and as a result new composition of suitable material was inevitable.

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<sup>38</sup> See also this section, sub-section: complementary, compensatory, and elaborative innovation.

<sup>39</sup> See also this chapter, section d, sub-sections: Stock motifs or episodes and Floating quatrains.

<sup>40</sup> For the role of accretion in the Scottish *Cath Gabhra* texts, see especially chapter 6, section a: *Mor anocht mo chumha féin* and section d, sub-section: Fragments with accretions.

## Compensatory innovation

### **The Eriskay Variant of the Dearg**

Not every instance of compensatory innovation involves newly composed material. An example of substitution of *dramatis personae* occurs in the Eriskay Dearg where the character of Cormac has dropped out entirely and Fionn replaces him throughout. This development is already present in the parent version of the text in the MacCallum collection<sup>41</sup> and internal evidence suggests that the reciters were not aware that the ballad had originally contained another character. A reference to Fionn's arrival on the following day (ll.140-143 in C.-W.113) is now incongruous since it follows a passage of dialogue between Fionn and the Dearg, although in general, the plot functions adequately with Fionn in Cormac's stead. The presence of the place name *Sealamain*, James Macpherson's Selma, provokes further suspicion, particularly since this replaces Tara and occurs in the passage where Fionn replaces Cormac, the king of Ireland. It is evident that these changes represent an attempt to bring the ballad closer to Macpherson's work; a passage later in the text imitates Macpherson's style (ll.211-229 in C.-W.113) and supports this view. It appears that Fionn and Sealamain were incorporated into the ballad at the same time and by the same individual who composed the later passage. The considerable amount of re-working of the text may have been done by the MacCallums themselves although it seems more likely that their sources, Duncan Matheson and the Rev. Calum MacLeod, both from Skye, were responsible.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Laoidh Fhraoich***

An example of compensatory innovation which involves material composed to fill a gap left by imperfect transmission is found in the version of *Laoidh Fhraoich* in Sir

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<sup>41</sup> See MacCallum, pp.95-105. The re-worked material does not materially affect any of the points made in connection with the passages from the Eriskay texts quoted here. I hope to investigate the problems associated with the MacCallum texts and its Eriskay descendants elsewhere in more detail.

<sup>42</sup> It could be argued that, because these changes were implemented due to a motivation provided by a context outside the ballad tradition, the above example of complementary innovation is only marginally relevant to the present discussion. It has to be remembered, however, that the MacCallum text was accepted into the oral tradition and was subject to the same transmissional processes and developments as any other ballad that did not undergo re-working.

George MacKenzie's collection of c.1800.<sup>43</sup> The following section of the unprovenanced text deals with the fight between Fraoch and the monster; the corresponding passage from the Gillies collection represents mainstream tradition:<sup>44</sup>

MacKenzie  
*Thachair Fraoch mac Cuaich fein*  
*Agus a bheisd taobh air taobh*  
*Shluig i, ge bu ro mhath aghleus*  
*Leithlaimh na beul o sgarra thaobh*  
*S truagh gun chladheamh crudigh cruadh*  
*Laimh mhic Cuaich na gruagh dearg*  
*Agus làn a chois a thir*  
*Aig an rìgh nach smuainich cealg.*  
*Labhair i ris le fearg*  
*O là bha i làn cealg is guinn*  
*Cha do chreid i Fraoch bhi marbh*  
*Ged bha bheisd gharbh na bhuinn.*

Gillies qq.19-24  
*Ghlac e an caoran air a bhar,*  
*'S tharuing e 'n crann as a fhreamh,*  
*Toirt a chosan do air tìr;*  
*Rug i air, a ris a bheist.*  
  
*Rug a bheist air, air an traigh,*  
*Ghlac i a lamh ann an craos,*  
*Ghlac eisin i air dha ghial,*  
*Ochoin? gun a scian aig Fraoch?*  
  
*Liodair a bheist a chneas bàn,*  
*Liodair i a lamh gu leon,*  
*Thainig ninghin ùr nan geal-ghlac,*  
*'S grad thug i dha scian d' an or.*

*Cha comhrag sud ach comhrag gearr,*  
*Bhuain e an ceann na laimh leis.*  
*Fraoch Mac Feadhaich is a bheist,*  
*Mo chreach leir mar thug iad greis!*

*Gu do thuit iad bonn re bonn,*  
*Air traidh nan clocha donn sa 'n iar.*  
*Nuair chunairc an t-saor nighean aidh*  
*Thuit i air an traidh na-nial,*

<sup>43</sup> *Rel.Celt.* I; pp.411-412.

<sup>44</sup> *LF* pp.31-32.



*Nuair a mhosgail i as a pramh,  
Ghlac i a lamh na laimh-bhoig,  
Ge d' tha thu nochd na d' chodaibh eun,  
'S mor an t euchd a rinn thu bhos.*

The MacKenzie passage appears to represent an attempt to restore a text of which the plot was still remembered but not the actual words. There is no textual overlap between MacKenzie and Gillies although many of the important features of the episode are present. The monster seizes Fraoch's hand, then the fact that he has no weapon is lamented; this is a sword in MacKenzie and a knife in Gillies and elsewhere. Both passages stress that the fight took place in a water location. The involvement of a woman diverges in the passages: in MacKenzie, the reference would seem to be to Meadhbh since she is described as treacherous; Gillies has, as expected, Meadhbh's unnamed daughter in her usual role as helper and as catalyst of the final lament.

MacKenzie's text as a whole diverges considerably from the majority of other versions of the ballad but in many of the remaining passages it is possible to detect a textual relationship with corresponding material elsewhere. There are also instances of elaborative innovation.<sup>45</sup> The above passage shows that it was possible to reconstruct a sequence of known contents satisfactorily even if the treatment of detail differs from the original. Metrically, the passage provides a reasonable approximation of the ballad's original *rannaigheacht mhór* in its use of end- and internal rhyme although other poetic decoration is almost entirely absent and the number of syllables in each line varies. Material pertaining to the Heroic Code in this and the elaborative passages are in keeping with the ballad tradition and would thus appear to suggest a date of composition before 1760 in a vernacular context since allusions to characters not belonging to the ballads stay within the range of Gaelic tradition.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See this section, sub-section: Elaborative innovation.

<sup>46</sup> As discussed in more detail in this section, sub-section: Elaborative innovation.

*Mór anocht mo chumha féin*

The scribal context provides an example of complementary innovation. The BDL text of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* (BDL XXII) contains six six-line units, qq.4, 24, 32, 33, 35, and 41. While it is difficult to determine whether these extended quatrains were composed originally in their present shape it is obvious that their sense makes them into cohesive units.<sup>47</sup> Versions of the ballad in later Irish tradition often have two six-line units which do not, however, correspond to any of the BDL ones.<sup>48</sup> Some Irish texts show greater agreement with BDL than others, e.g. TOS.<sup>49</sup> This text employs regular quatrains throughout and some of the BDL six-line units have been regularised either by the loss of a couplet (BDL 24, 33) or by combination with other quatrains (BDL 4, 35). BDL 32 and 41, however, have been split up into two parts, one containing lines a-d and another which has lines e and f and a new couplet (TOS qq.28 and 32, and 39 and 40) which do not have an equivalent in any of the texts I have consulted so far.<sup>50</sup> The complemented BDL unit is divided by the equivalent of BDL q.31 and two quatrains which are paralleled by other Irish versions of the ballad. The Irish texts that are generally further removed from BDL provide another insight into the complementation of some of the BDL six-line units. BDL 32 and 33 have been regularised by the loss of a couplet in either case but BDL 4, 24, 35, and 41 were each extended into two separate quatrains which are, however, closely linked thematically. Examples of this are found in Ó Siochfhradha's text<sup>51</sup> and include qq.4 and 5, 28 and 29, 79 and 80, and 45 and 46; in each case, a new couplet has been added at the end of the original six-line unit. Despite this regularisation, this and a number of closely related versions also contain two six-line units (10 and 17). The first of these has an equivalent quatrain in BDL q.16 and the new couplet was placed in the middle of the quatrain; the second one does not appear to have

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<sup>47</sup> See also Meek: HC, discussion of BDL XXII, section iii Later versions, sub-section (b) BDL XXII, and *ibid.* line notes.

<sup>48</sup> An example of correspondence is extant in RIA 24 P 29, as discussed by Meek, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> TOS I, pp.110-133. For a more wide-ranging discussion of the relationship between BDL and its Irish counterparts see chapter 5, section c: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

<sup>50</sup> Although the TOS equivalent of BDL 41 has expanded counterparts in other texts the added couplet differs in these cases.

<sup>51</sup> Ó Siochfhradha, *Laoithe na Féinne*; pp.206-212.

a BDL equivalent. These expanded six-line units are also represented in other manuscripts.<sup>52</sup>

It appears that there exists a strand of tradition which aimed at eliminating the six-line units that are present in most texts of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*; the newly composed couplets that complement the quatrains which parallel the BDL units would seem to indicate that complementary innovation is a technique which is not employed frequently to improve seemingly defective texts. There is also the problem of overlap between complementary and elaborative innovation. Material that extends over more than a quatrain is best classed as elaborative.

### Elaborative innovation

#### **Duncan Kennedy's texts**

Elaborative innovation appears to be more common and more easily identifiable than compensatory or complementary innovation since it usually involves larger sections of material. Occasionally, it is possible to observe the innovator who composed the new material, as in the case of Duncan Kennedy who marks the quatrains he added to traditional versions of ballads in his two collections.<sup>53</sup> Some of the material he claims as his is paralleled in other versions of the same ballad and must therefore be regarded as traditional; other passages which have no equivalents elsewhere are very likely Kennedy's although he did not mark them as such in his manuscripts. A number of Kennedy's passages are successful imitations of the ballad idiom in style and contents while other material is reminiscent of James Macpherson. Those quatrains that are in keeping with ballad tradition, however, demonstrate that the composition of new material in an appropriate style was still possible towards the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>54</sup>

It appears to be a common feature of elaborative innovation that the new material does not fit completely or convincingly into the framework of the original ballad. It seems reasonable to suggest that such material was composed in a literary and

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<sup>52</sup> RIA 3 B 9, RIA F VI 2, RIA 24 A 17, and RIA 24 A 21. See Appendix, Part 1, Irish Texts: section b: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* for the text of RIA 3 B 9. See also chapter 5, section c: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

<sup>53</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.9. and 73.2.10.

<sup>54</sup> See also chapter 2, section c, sub-section: The eighteenth century and chapter 6, section c, sub-section: *'S muldach mi an déidh Chaoilte* (Kennedy's texts of *'S muldach mi...*).

intellectual environment that no longer imposed the rigorous constraints and technical virtuosity of the bardic tradition on its practitioners. Metres are treated with much more freedom than even the rules of *ógláchas* demand and occasionally the rhyme patterns differ between the old and the new passages; e.g. *rannaigheacht mhór*-type quatrains are found in *deibhidhe*-based ballads. At times, the new material causes incongruities in plot structure or weakens the tight construction of the plot; there are also occasions where the elaborative material has only a tenuous link with the rest of the ballad. The language is vernacular and largely without the linguistic conservatism that the ballad tradition inherited from its ultimate origin as a product of the professional poets. Such indicators suggest an origin in the post-Classical period for the majority of elaborative passages. Despite their weaknesses it appears that many were absorbed into tradition since multiple versions from the oral and the scribal environment are extant.

#### **BDL VII/DF LXV and later tradition**

The tight construction of the plot of BDL VII, *Lá dhán deachaidh Fionn do dh'ól* or DF LXV, *La da raibh Fionn ag ol*, has not been improved by the addition of passages of dialogue between the errant wives and their husbands that characterises the long recension of this ballad which is in evidence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Ireland. Although the language in the new passages attempts to imitate the older sections it does not match the pace or the efficient compactness of the original material.<sup>55</sup>

#### **Irish versions of the Dearg**

Another example from an Irish context appears in some unpublished versions of the Dearg. Following the introduction of the Dearg that opens the ballad, a sequence of four new quatrains has been inserted between qq.5 and 6 of the equivalents of DF LXIII, *Aithreos caithréim in fir moir*.<sup>56</sup> The following sequence from RIA 3 B 28, written in 1816 by John Mara of Carrick-on-Suir, shows the new material; a closely related text is

<sup>55</sup> A scribal context is likely for this particular instance of elaborative innovation although the evidence is not conclusive. A passage from this ballad is discussed in chapter 1, section d, sub-section: Oral input in the scribal environment?

<sup>56</sup> DF II, pp.298-317.

found in RIA 23 L 8 although other versions which have at least some of the new quatrains are extant as well.

DF LXIII qq.5-6

*Do bhi días nar cumang dáil  
ag coiméd in chúain chobharbháin*

*Raíghne na ród mac Finn*

*'S a' Cáol crodha mac Criomthuinn*

RIA 3 B 28 qq.4-9

*Do bhi an dís nár chúmhag dáil,*

*Aig coimead an chuain chubharbhán;*

*Roighne roisgleathan mac Fhinn,*

*Is Caolchrodha mac Criomhtainn.*

*Air feithiomh an farge doibh,*

*Sa narm gaisge na ndoid;*

*Do chonarcadar oglaoidh aneas,*

*An iorradh aluin ogharghlas.*

*Maiseadh an Dearg ud anoir,*

*Fear leagtha iomad sloigh;*

*Do shiubhlas o thoinn go tuinn,*

*Is deimhin gurab e aníogh air lo.*

*Is cuma liom cia atá an,*

*Do radh Caol-chrodha mac Criomhthainn;*

*Ni bhfuil aon laoch san mbith bhán,*

*Nach deanfuin fein a dhiongmhail.*

*Go madh fíor is go madh beacht,*

*Dhuitse feinn a bhfuil as bheal;*

*Anuar chlaoidhfíor leat an fear,*

*Tiocfad leat ar leath an sgeil.*

*Nior choimhéid siadsan an cúan*

*do thuitsiod 'na ttoircim súain*

*tainic bárc in fhir mhóir*

*ar in tracht fa a cceartcomair*

*Nior choimead an dís an cuan,*

*Do thuitedar na ttoirchim suainn;*

*An trath bo lionmhar lán,*

*Triallus Dearg na gcomhdhail.*

Regarding the quatrains that parallel the DF material, there is agreement except in the case of Raighne's identifying epithet and in the case of the final couplet of the quatrain that ends the sequence. The sense of this couplet suits the context and the end-rhyme fits the *deibhidhe*-based metre; there is even an instance of alliteration. The couplet is hypometric in this version but corresponding texts show that both heptasyllabic and hypermetric examples exist; there are also versions that preserve the DF couplet. The treatment of metre varies in competence in the new quatrains. Qq.5 and 7 show good *deibhidhe*-type end rhyme and even give some alliteration although the number of syllables varies. Qq.6 and 8, on the other hand, appear to have *rannaigheacht mhór*-style end-rhymes and internal rhyme only occurs in one instance (q.8cd). Other metrical decoration is scarce. Despite the problem of metre it seems possible that all four new quatrains were incorporated by the same composer because they form a dialogue between the two watchers which anticipates the combat sequence of the next episode. The new quatrains do not agree well with the surrounding plot structure. Having spotted the invader and discussed his likely identity, and the possibility of fighting him, as the new quatrains describe the situation, it is hardly logical for the two watchers to fall asleep while the Dearg lands. Contradictory statements such as this are unlikely to be the product of a trained poet; they are, however, comparable to the material which expands the plot of DF LXV. The above example is not the only instance of elaborative innovation in this variant of the Dearg.

### *Laoidh Fhraoich*

Elaborative innovation can be observed in Scottish tradition as well. A number of versions of *Laoidh Fhraoich* prefix a list of heroes whose unfaithful wives have left them; a sequence follows which enumerates seven kings whom Meadhbh has supposedly put to death. Most of these texts are unpublished and Sir George MacKenzie's version has most of the elaborative material.<sup>57</sup> The quatrains dealing with the unfaithful wives appear at the beginning of his text while the kings whose deaths Meadhbh caused conclude the ballad. The following sequence comes from C.-W.103 (B); no information is given regarding either the scribe or the source and provenance of the ballad:

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<sup>57</sup> This is printed in: *Rel Celt.* I; pp.411-412.



1. *'Oganaich o'n d'fhalbh ä bhean,  
Ged do bha i, seal, riut réith,  
Uime sin na bi fo lionn,  
Dh'imich o Fhionn ä bhean féin.*
  
2. *Dh'fhalbh ä bhean o Rìgh nan ruag,  
Bu cheannard e air sluagh céin,  
Leig i 'curach air an t-snamh  
Chionn a gràidh air rìgh Lochléin.<sup>58</sup>*
  
3. *Dh'fhalbh ä bhean o Ghlas mac Seirc,  
'S cha d'fhidir cead o'n rosg mhall;-  
Coireall, ged bu ghlan ä ghnùis,  
Rinn ä bhean cùis thar ä cheann.*
  
4. *Mac Ruidir an domhain mhòir  
Dh'fhéum e fòr<sup>59</sup> fa dhè'in ä mhnà;  
Loisg i e fa leith na lùim.<sup>60</sup>  
'S maìrg ni mùirne fa na mnà!*
  
5. *Eidrigheadh gach fear fo'n ghréin  
A bhean féin, mu'n gníomh<sup>61</sup> i lochd,  
Mu'n bi i, rithist, nān deigh,  
Mar bha Maigh, a' caoidh na corp.*
  
6. *Seachd rìghre do chuir i bàs,  
(Gum bu mhòr an cràdh 's an toirt!)  
Fearghus, Coireall, 'us Daorghlas,  
'Us Conull, laoch nan arm nocht!*

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<sup>58</sup> Footnote in manuscript: 'al. Grèig.'

<sup>59</sup> Footnote in manuscript: 'faire.'

<sup>60</sup> Footnote in manuscript: 'al. fo' leine luim'.

<sup>61</sup> Footnote in manuscript: 'dean.'

7.     *Cuchuillinn, le'n sgoiltear sgiath,*  
           *'S marcach dian a' mhuingeich ghil,*  
           *'S Rosg mac Maothaich, righ nan cliar,*  
           *Nach d'ob, riamh, aon duin' air bith.*

The textual notes by the scribe may indicate that he had access to a variant text for comparison; alternatively, they may be corrections made after taking the text down from recitation if this is a text from oral tradition. Metrically, the new passage does not exhibit much poetic decoration but there is end-rhyme in the style of the *rannaigheacht mhór* of the ballad proper. The connection with the rest of the text is tenuous since the theme of the unfaithful wife plays no role in the ballad. There is a slightly better link in the second part of the passage since Fraoch's death was contrived by Meadhbh who does appear as the instigator of the end of several eminent heroes. Meadhbh's less than impeccable conduct as a wife is widely known in tradition and this, combined with her role in the ballad, may have led to the incorporation of the sequence into the ballad although there are also examples of its appearance on its own.<sup>62</sup>

The passage appears to belong to a strand of tradition which was not part of the learned environment since it mixes characters from different contexts. Fraoch and Meadhbh, despite their Connacht association in the ballad, have strong links with the Ulster Cycle as well and it is possible that Cú Chulainn was included in the king-list for that reason. The prose tale *Aided Con Culainn* sheds light on Meadhbh's role in bringing about Cú Chulainn's death; it is perhaps significant for the present context to note that the earliest extant manuscript of the story is found in Scotland.<sup>63</sup> The other Ulster Cycle character in the list of kings is Conall who is, however, placed in the same couplet as Fearghus, Coireall, and Daorghlas, characters that are associated with the Fionn-context. It is possible that the Fearghus mentioned here is the Ulster Cycle character Fergus mac Roich although it appears more likely that, because of his immediate association with two companions of Fionn, he is Fearghus File. The identity of this character is of minor importance since other versions mention Fraoch in his stead. The remaining two characters, Marcach Dian (if he is meant to be a separate character rather than a description of Cú Chulainn as the above example suggests) and Rosg mac Maothaich, I have not been able to identify.

<sup>62</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. and LF, p.

<sup>63</sup> Van Hamel *Compert Con Culainn...*; pp.69-70.

In the list of heroes whose wives left them, there is a similar mixing of characters from different contexts. Fionn heads the list and in his case the allusion must be to Gràinne's elopement with Diarmaid. Rìgh nan Ruag is likely to be a corruption of Fionn's son Raighne Ruadh although I am not aware of a tradition which relates the elopement of his wife with the king of Lochlann or the king of Greece; the same is true in the case of Coireall, another of Fionn's sons. Glas mac Seirc appears to be an obscure character, and *Mac Ruidir* (for *Ridire*) *an domhain mhòir* is a name that is found in the context of hero tale or Romantic tale although overlap with Fionn-material is well evidenced in tradition.

### **Patterns of loss and abbreviated material**

The loss of material is an important feature of the oral context in particular. Scribal error and defective exemplars can be observed as the most common reasons for textual loss in manuscripts; in the oral environment, there is a much wider range of patterns that illustrate the mechanisms which appear to be at work in textual loss. There is of course, the possibility that a reciter leaves out a section of text by accident. In many cases, however, seemingly accidental loss can be explained in terms of how it affects the plot. In the strongly narrative ballads that are popular in later tradition, each plot episode is linked to the previous one by internal logic. Some episodes are essential for the understanding of the plot, others, for example descriptive or panegyric passages, are designed to create a particular atmosphere in a ballad by their use of vivid detail.<sup>64</sup> On occasion, episodes are present which are not vital to the plot but make its general structure more appealing. It appears to be rare for essential episodes to drop out of a ballad entirely although non-essential and descriptive episodes may disappear altogether.

#### Loss of episodes

##### ***Laoidh Fhraoich***

This process is illustrated by MacKenzie's version of *Laoidh Fhraoich* which has lost the introductory passage of lament that also introduces the background to

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<sup>64</sup> See also this chapter, section d: sub-section: Visuality and its role in the survival of non-essential material.

Meadhbh's jealousy. The episode telling of the magic rowan tree has likewise dropped out as has the episode in which Meadhbh's daughter throws a knife to Fraoch during his struggle with the monster. There is also no trace of the sequence of panegyric that concludes the ballad in other versions. The plot has thus been reduced to the following key episodes which themselves have been condensed: Meadhbh's illness, Fraoch's two trips to the island where the rowan tree grows, and the monster fight which results in Fraoch's death. Unusually, this version states that the wounded monster returned to the loch; other versions agree that Fraoch killed the monster. It is possible that the elaborative passages at the beginning and the end of MacKenzie's version<sup>65</sup> were implicated in the disappearance of the lament and the praise sequence although other short versions without elaborative material that concentrate on the same key episodes are extant, e.g. a twentieth century text recorded from William Matheson in 1954; this text preserves the intervention of Meadhbh's daughter in rudimentary form.<sup>66</sup> The loss of these non-essential episodes leaves a plot that still makes sense even without the descriptive and explanatory detail of the lost passages. In the case of some abbreviated versions it is possible that unrecorded prose passages existed which provided the remaining information, in a similar way to Ceite Laoruidh's text.<sup>67</sup> This, however, does not appear to have been the case in MacKenzie's version since he gives short introductory prose passages to most of the other ballads in his collection.<sup>68</sup>

### *Eas Ruaidh*

Nineteenth century ballad texts show the loss of non-essential episodes as well. An undated and unprovenanced text of *Eas Ruaidh* in C.-W.273 presents an almost complete if condensed plot on comparison with more complete texts, e.g. BDL XX, *Aithnidh domh sgéal beag air Fionn*.<sup>69</sup> There is, however, one minor episode that has dropped out: in other versions, after the pursuer's arrival Fionn and the lady engage in a question-and-answer dialogue in which the pursuer is identified and reassurance given to

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<sup>65</sup> See also this section, sub-section: Elaborative innovation.

<sup>66</sup> *Tocher* 34 (1981); pp.292-297.

<sup>67</sup> *LF* pp.32-33.

<sup>68</sup> *Rel.Celt.* I; pp.400-424.

<sup>69</sup> The date of C.-W.273 must be after 1862 since a scribal note in the manuscript refers to the Dean of Lismore. This would appear to be a reference to MacLauchlan's edition of BDL which appeared in that year.

the lady (BDL qq.23-24). In most extant versions, this is followed by a quatrain telling that Osgar and Goll confront the pursuer; in C.-W.273, this quatrain precedes the pursuer's arrival. Fionn has already pledged his protection to the lady earlier in the text, and the pursuer has already been identified at the same time. The two missing quatrains did not provide any new information but merely confirmed what the conventions of plot demand anyway. The character who is described after the Osgar-and-Goll quatrain is hardly likely to be anybody but the lady's pursuer. In this case, the loss of a non-essential episode results in a plot structure which is more economical. C.-W.273 is not the only version which has lost this episode although a significant textual relationship is only evident in the case of a text of 1802 collected in Strathnaver by the Rev. Donald Sage.<sup>70</sup>

### Small-scale loss

Textual loss frequently involves only part of an episode, resulting in most cases in a more economical presentation of the plot although occasionally vital material may be lost. Such contraction may be achieved by the loss of quatrains, couplets, or single lines. The most common patterns here are loss of quatrains and conflation of quatrains as a result of the loss of couplets; sometimes, the loss of a couplet results in a lone couplet.

### *Eas Ruaidh*

The C.-W.273 text of *Eas Ruaidh* has several instances of abbreviated episodes which illustrate the above patterns. The introductory episode which takes up two quatrains in BDL XX and sets the scene has been reduced to one quatrain by the loss of the equivalent of BDL q. 1. Since this quatrain appears to have been designed to catch the audience's attention its loss does not affect the plot since the quatrain that opens C.-W.273 (=BDL q.2) provides information regarding the location and some of the protagonists, namely Fionn and some companions, and a lady). The process of contraction can be observed in the first combat sequence in the ballad where the pursuer's onslaught is checked by Goll and Osgar and he demands to fight all fifty of Fionn's warriors as a result. This takes up qq.15-18 in C.-W.273. A roughly contemporary version, a text conflated from the recitation of Hugh MacMillan of

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<sup>70</sup> *Rel.Celt.* I; pp.376-378.

Tobermory and Neil MacLean of Tiree, who learned his text from a reciter from Eigg, contains a corresponding longer sequence in qq.C and D, and 22-26; this text is extant in C.-W.280.

C.-W.273

15. *Cha d'ath e do churaidh no do thriath,  
Do aon laoch dha robh ann,  
Ach sir chuir tàir air an Fhéinn'  
Gus an d'thàinig e féin gu Fionn.*

16. *Sgriob e 'bhean á làimh an rìgh,  
Air an taobh gu'n d'fhalbh e leatha;*

*Ach na thilg Mac-Moìrne 'n àigh  
Urchar 'na dhéigh de'n t-sleagh.  
Mu'n do sgar an urchar  
Rinn i sgiath 'na dà bloigh.*

17. *Thilg an t-Oscar 'ba mhòr fearg  
[A' chraoisich dhearg o làimh chli]  
Gu'n mharbhadh leis steud an fhir,  
'S mòr an cion a rinn an saoi*

C.-W.280

C. *Cha d'fheuch e lann no sgiath  
Do laoch no triath gan robh ann  
'S gun d'rinn e tàir air an Fheinn  
Gus an d'ràinig a féin Fionn.*

D. *Thàinig an laoch bu mhòr tlachd  
Thugainn le sgairt a's gnìomh,  
'S gun d'fhuadaich a bh'uainn a bhean  
Bha air guallain Fear an Rìgh*

22. *Dh'eirich Oscar, 's dh'eirich Goll,  
'S cha b' olc an casgairt lom sa chath  
Sheas iad air iomall an t'slòigh  
Eadar am fear mòr sa bhean.*

23. *Thug Mac Mòrn' an urchair gheur  
'S a dhà làimh 's chrò na deigh  
'S ged nach do bhean i ga chrè  
Gun d'rinn i sgéith na da bhloigh*

24. *Thilg an t'Oscar bu mhor fearg  
A chraoslach dhearg o làimh chli  
Leagadar leis steud an fhir,  
Bu mhòr an t-euchd a chinnich leinn<sup>71</sup>*

<sup>71</sup> The following quatrain is marked as a variant, presumably of q.24, in the manuscript: [Thilg mise chraoslach na dhéigh/ An urchair nach bu réidh ri chneas/ Bha'n urchair air steud an fhir/ 'S mòr an cron a chinneadh leatha]. The use of C. and D. for the two initial quatrains of the passage is not explained but may indicate that they either came from one reciter only or that they were left out of the original recitation and added later.



18. *Dar thuit e 'n sin air an leirg*  
*Thionndaidh e le feirg is le faoch*  
*Bhagair e ged ba mhòr am beud*  
*Còmhrag ri caogad laoch.*

25. *Leagadh an steud air an leirg*  
*A's thionndaidh e le fearg 's fraoch*  
*Is bhagair e ge be mòr ar neart*  
*Còmhrag air ar còig ciad laoch.*

26. *Mach bh'uamsa 's bho m'athair fhein*  
*Chaidh an còig ciad laoch na dhàil*  
*'S ge mor an spionnadh 's an treis*  
*Gun gheall e 'n casgairt le làimh*

C.-W.273 has no equivalent to C.-W.280 q.26 and its six-line unit 16 is a conflated version of C.-W.280 qq.D.cd and 23. The couplet which corresponds to q.D.cd has been reworked but still gives a logical account of events. C.-W.280 q.22 is misplaced from its usual place earlier in the ballad, probably because the action in qq.23-25 focuses on Goll and Osgar. The two versions are also illustrative of the range of verbal variation that exists in an oral context.

#### *Laoidh Fhraoich*

A good example of contraction of episodes occurs in a text of *Laoidh Fhraoich* recorded in 1953 by Calum MacLean from the South Uist reciter Duncan MacDonald.<sup>72</sup> Although probably a direct descendant, via several stages of transmission, of the version of the ballad in the Gillies collection,<sup>73</sup> MacDonald's text has conflated Fraoch's two trips to the rowan tree and treats them as one event; the description of the rowan tree and its healing properties has been moved to the position of the first trip. MacDonald's rowan tree passage has also been abbreviated, as comparison with the corresponding sequence in the Gillies version indicates. The quatrains which show how Fraoch's two trips are conflated are given as well.

<sup>72</sup> SA 1953/34/A2.

<sup>73</sup> LF pp.31-32. See also chapter 2, section d, sub-section: Reciters and Recitation (the Gillies collection and oral tradition).

MacDonald (qq.7-10)

*'S caoran do ghléidh i air Loch Màidh  
Air an tràigh a siar fo dheas  
Gach aon rèithe is gach aon mhìos  
Bidh toradh buaidh anns a' mhios*

*Bidh toradh buaidh anns a' mhios dhearg  
'S gun mìsde e na mìl bhlàth  
A chumadh na caoran 's 'ad dearg  
Neach beò gun bhiadh fad naoi tràth*

*'S gu'n ghluais Fraoch air ceum neo-àigh  
'S gu'n deach e 'shnàmh air an loch  
'S fhuair e a bhiast 'na siorram suain  
'S a craos-se suas ris an dos.*

*Ghlac e an caoran a's a' bharr  
'S gu'n spion e an crann as a fhrèimh  
Toirt a chasan leis air tìr  
Rug i air a rithist - a bhéist.*

Gillies (qq.8-11, 15 and 19)

*8. Caòran do bhi air Locha Mai;  
Ann san traidh tha siar fa dheas  
Gach a Raithe 's gach a mìos  
Bhi toradh abuidh ann sa mheas.*

*9. Bha buaidh air a mheasa dhearg  
Bu mhillse e na mìl bhla  
Gu 'n cumadh an caoran is e dearg  
Neach beo gun bhidh car naoi Trath.*

*10. Bliadhna do shaoghal gach fir;  
Dh'innsinn duibh anois a dhearbh  
Gu cabhradh e air luchd chneadh,  
Brìgh a mheasa is e dearg.*

*11. 'N aimcheist mhor a bha na dhiaidh,  
Ge b'e a chabhradh na sloigh.  
A bheist nimh a bhi na bhun;  
Gràbadh do dhuine dol d'a bhuain.*

*15. Ghluais Fraoch air cheimnibh aidh,  
'S chuaidh è shnamh air an Loch;  
Fhuair e bheist na suram suain;  
'S craos suas ris an dós.*

*19. Ghlac e an caoran air a bhar'  
'S tharuing e 'na crann as a fhreamh,  
Toirt a chosan do air tìr;  
Rug i air a ris a bheist.*

The rowan tree sequence has lost Gillies qq.10 and 11; the first of these quatrains elaborates on the healing properties of the berries while the second one introduces the monster. The appearance of the sleeping monster in MacDonald q.9 is thus somewhat

abrupt compared to other versions which preserve the full rowan tree sequence although the plot still works. The dramatic impact of the separate trips to the island, separated by Meadhbh's request for the entire tree, in the Gillies version (qq.15-17) has been much lessened by their conflation in MacDonald's text. It is likely that MacDonald learned his text in its present shape since his introductory prose summary of the ballad only mentions one trip. The second trip to the island has lost Gillies q 18 which describes how Fraoch swam across for the second time. The transposed q.9 in MacDonald, corresponding to Gillies q.15, has thus been transferred to an appropriate context.

### **Patterns of change in order of sequence and transposed material**

#### *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*

It is possible for sections of text to be transferred from their original textual environment to a different place in the same ballad. Instances of this occur in Duncan MacDonald's version of *Laoidh Fhraoich* and in the *Eas Ruaidh* texts in C.-W.273 and C.-W.280.<sup>74</sup> Transposed sequences are usually short and in most cases, their new context is appropriate if not always entirely satisfactory. Christina Sutherland's version of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* contains an unusually large number of examples of transposed material. This text is the closest of the extant versions to BDL XXII as regards significant verbal agreement, despite the fact that much of the text has been moved from its original context to a different one. This process is illustrated by the following sequence from Sutherland's text where the mention of the battle of Gabhra in q.9 has attracted two quatrains telling of the casualties of the battle which are found towards the end of the BDL text:<sup>75</sup>

9.      *Chuir sinn sin cath Gour,*  
           *Is chuir gu fuathach fuileach feargach*  
           *Thuit an Fheinn bonn ri bonn.*  
           *Is fearadh uaisle Eirinn*

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<sup>74</sup> See this section, sub-section: Patterns of loss and abbreviated material.

<sup>75</sup> The entire text is given in the Appendix, Part 2, Scottish Texts: section a: Scottish Versions of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

10. *Deich fichead agus fichead ceud,  
Sgeul fìor na abream breug,  
Gu'n robh sìnte an la sin,  
Air a mhagh gun anam,*
  
11. *Dha uiread eile sin bha ann,  
Aig Rìgh Eirìn sgeul bu mho  
Gu'n robh sìnte air an taobh eile.  
Do uaisle Eirinn an airm ghlain,*

Q.9 corresponds to BDL q.9 in the order bacd and qq.10 and 11 are paralleled by BDL qq.52 and 53; there is some verbal divergence as is to be expected in texts as far apart in time as these two.<sup>76</sup>

From this and other similar instances mentioned above it appears that a well-constructed plot plays an important role in aiding reciters to remember a text easily and accurately. It seems reasonable to suggest that events narrated in a ballad are often linked with specific quatrains in a certain shape and order and that plot and actual text mutually reinforce each other's memorability. Even a process like transposition of material sheds light on the relationship between plot and words: transposed passages can be shown to have been attracted to their new position because they are associated in an obvious way. In Christina Sutherland's *Cath Gabhra* sequence above, the association with its new environment by the theme of losses in battle. In *Eas Ruaidh*, the Goll-quatraine in C.-W.280 is associated with its new environment by the character's name which is present in the quatrain which follows it. Instances of such 'wrong' associations which nevertheless result in a plausible if not always entirely satisfactory sequence of events in a given text are found throughout later Scottish ballad tradition.

### *Innis dhuinn a Phàdraig*

A slightly different situation applies to dialogue ballads; e.g. the Dialogue, *Innis dhuinn a Phàdraig*. Since there is no proper plot to follow, such ballads can be observed to divide into dialogue constituents such as question-and-answer sequences or statement-

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<sup>76</sup> For a detailed discussion of all instances of transposition, see chapter 6, section a, sub-section: Christina Sutherland's text and BDL.

and-reply passages. There is no necessity imposed by the structure of the ballad for one constituent to follow on another in a particular order. A good example of this is found by comparing Donald MacNicol's version of the Dialogue with Archibald Fletcher's<sup>77</sup> where their widespread agreement in order of quatrains is balanced by a number of dialogue constituents which appear in different contexts. The initial nine quatrains show how two different dialogue constituents have been transposed from their indicated position later in Fletcher's text to a position following the initial sequence.<sup>78</sup>

MacNicol  
1. *Aillis Sgeil, a Phadric,*  
*An Onnair do Lebhaidh,*  
*A bheil neibh gu harrid,*  
*Aig Fianibh na Herin.*

2. *Bheirnsa Briar dhutsa*  
*Ossain nan Glonn,*  
*Nach heil Neibh aig Tathir,*  
*Aig Oscar na aig Goll.*

3. *'S olc an Sgeil a Phadric,*  
*A haggad 'dhos', a chlerich,*  
*Com am Bithimse ri Crabhaidh*  
*Mar heil Neibh aig Fianibh Erin.*

4. *Nach Doinnigh shin, Ossain,*  
*Fhir nan Briaribh baoille,*  
*'S gum bearr Dia re aoin Uair,*  
*Na Fian Erin uille.*

Fletcher  
1. *Innis dhuinne, 'Phàdruic,*  
*Air onoir do leubhaidh;*  
*'Bheil neamh gu h-àraidh,*  
*Aig 'Maithibh Fiann na Fèinne.*

2. *Dh' inninse sin dhuitsa,*  
*Oisain nan glond;*  
*Cha' neil neamh aig t-athair,*  
*Aig Osgar ao aig Goul.*

3. *'S olc an sgeula àraidh,*  
*Tha agad dhuinn' a Chlèirich;*  
*Com am bithinnsa ri cràbhaidh,*  
*Mur 'eil neamh aig Maithibh Fiann na Feinne.*

27. *'S olc leam sin 'uaitse Oisain,*  
*Fhir nam briathra' bòile;*  
*'S gum b' fhearr Dia ri aon uair,*  
*Na Fiann na Feinne uile.*

<sup>77</sup> Fletcher's text follows MacNicol's in *LF*, pp.42-44.

<sup>78</sup> The order of quatrains in Fletcher's text is paralleled by other versions; e.g. Peter MacFarlane's (*Rel.Celt.* I; pp.263-266) and Young's (*TRIA* I; pp.97-105). Fletcher's text indicates the speakers in the dialogue.

5. *Bearr leum aoin Chath laidir*  
*Chunigh Fion na Feine*  
*Na Tighearn' a Chrabhaidh shin,*  
*Agus Ussa 'Chlerich.*

6. *Ge begg a Chuil' chronanich*  
*Agus Monaran na Greine*  
*Gun Fhios don Rìogh Mhoralich*  
*Cha deid fo Bhiligh a Sceigh.*

7. *N' saoil u 'm binnin E 's mac Cubhail*  
*An Rìogh 'bhaggain air na Fianibh,*  
*Dhede gach Neich bha air Hallibh*  
*Dol na Tsheolle sin gun iarraidh.*

8. *Ossain! 's fadde do Tshuain,*  
*Erich a suas 's eist na Sailm*  
*Fon chaill u nish do Lu 's do Rath*  
*'S nach cuir Cath ri La gairbh.*

9. *Ma chaill mi mo Lu 's mo Rath,*  
*'S nach mairin Cath a bhaig Fion,*  
*Do 'd Chleirsnichd, s beg mo speis,*  
*'S do cheoil eisdichd nin fiach liom.*

28. *B' fhearr leamsa aon chath laidir*  
*A chuireadh Fiann na Fèinne;*  
*Na tighearna a chràbhaidh sin,*  
*Is thusa a Chleirich.*

19. *Ge beag a chu'ill chronnanach,*  
*Is mònaran na grèine;*  
*Cha theid gun fhios don Rìgh mhoralach,*  
*Fu bhar bhilibh a sgeidhsan.*

20. *Cha b' ionnan è 's Fionn mac Cuthail,*  
*An Rìgh bh' againn air na Fiannaibh;*  
*Dh' fhaodaodh Tr an domhunn,*  
*Dol na thallasan gun iarraidh.*

4. *Oisain gur fada do shuain,*  
*Eirich suas is eisd na sailm;*  
*Chaill thu nis do luth 's do rath,*  
*'S cha chuir thu cath ri la-garbh.*

5. *Mu chaill mi mo luth 's mo rath,*  
*'S nach cuir mi cath ri la-garbh;*  
*Do 'd chleirsneach gur beag mo speis*  
*'S de cheol eisdeachd m 'm fiach leom.*

The initial three quatrains are linked by the theme of the possibility of heaven for the heroes of the *Fian* and therefore form a dialogue constituent. The quatrain beginning *Oisain gur fada do shuain*, the common initial quatrain in Irish texts, differs in metre and rhythm and this as well as the break in themes may have contributed to the shift of dialogue constituents in MacNicol's text where the next thematic link is provided by Patrick's question whether Oisean prefers God to the *Fian* (qq.4-5). These two quatrains are connected by the repetition of the phrase *is fhearr (leam)* to prevent their splitting up. The new context provided by the preceding episode is appropriate since the theme of God's superiority follows on neatly from Oisean's rejection of Patrick's belief that the



*Fian* are not in Heaven. The next transposed constituent (qq.6-7) also deals with God's superiority in terms of his omniscience which Oisean misunderstands and counters by a reference to Fionn's generosity. There is no obvious strong link between this constituent and the following quatrains which begin a sequence dealing with Oisean's old age (qq.8-9) which in turn moves on to a discussion of whose music is best. The sequence about Oisean's old age is linked by repetition of an entire line to ensure that the two quatrains stay together. In Fletcher's text, there is no strong link between the first displaced sequence and the preceding dialogue constituent which may have facilitated a shift to a different context. The second transposed item follows on from a discussion of the *Fian* in Hell and no link is evident to connect the two constituents. There is, however, a good connection between this and the following sequence in Fletcher where Patrick objects to Oisean's comparison of Fionn and God.

Generally, dialogue passages within non-dialogue ballads tend to be linked in much the same way as the dialogue constituents in the above sequence. Question-and-answer passages form a cohesive unit and are for that reason unlikely to drop out entirely. Many dialogue sequences are at the same time a means of furthering the plot which is likely to promote their intact preservation.

### **Section c: Dynamics of Textual Survival**

Although patterns of innovation involving additional or lost material play an important role in textual development there are also factors that are involved in the survival of texts. Neither the oral nor the scribal environment is likely to preserve a text completely unchanged in the way multiple copies of a printed text would; generally, the scribal context promotes a greater degree of textual stability than the oral one.<sup>79</sup> There is, however, a significant amount of material that is paralleled in different versions of ballads which can be used to investigate the mechanisms at work in the preservation of texts. A clearly structured plot would seem to be important in this respect, at least in the case of predominantly narrative ballads; repetition and parallel construction can aid

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<sup>79</sup> See chapter 2, section b, sub-section: The Irish scribal tradition.

memory as well.<sup>80</sup> It appears that certain aspects of form and content combine to promote intact textual survival while simultaneously allowing for a certain degree of verbal divergence.<sup>81</sup>

### Visuality and its role in survival of non-essential material

Descriptive detail is found in many ballads in considerable profusion and its presence can be assessed at several levels. Looking at other genres of literature, description plays an important role in panegyric compositions, whether bardic or vernacular, and is likely to be present in the ballads as a result of the aristocratic links of the genre. *Laoidh Fhraoich*, *Eas Ruaidh*, and the *Dearg* are examples of ballads which contain a significant amount of descriptive panegyric passages. Description can also serve to evoke a certain mood in a ballad, as in a sequence in *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* where Oisean finds the dying Osgar which achieves great emotional impact by means of a description of the scene. The Oisean-Osgar passage is an episode central to the ballad and therefore likely to be preserved in later tradition; it is present in all of the extant Scottish texts and also in a sample of Irish ones.

Descriptive praise passages usually have to be considered non-essential as regards plot development; yet they exhibit great tenacity in surviving into later tradition. Much of the detail in such sequences involves imagery which invites visualisation. An example of this is found in the praise of Fraoch in Duncan MacDonald's version of *Laoidh Fhraoich*, compared with its ancestor in the Gillies collection:<sup>82</sup>

MacDonald (qq.17-19)

Gillies (qq.26-31)

17. <i>Ionnmhainn tighearn 's ionnmhainn tuath</i>	26. <i>Ionmhuinn Tighearn ionmhuinn Tuath,</i>
<i>Ionnmhainn gruaidh o'n deirge a' ròs</i>	<i>Ionmhuinn gruaidh a's deirge ros,</i>
<i>Ionnmhainn beul o'n deirg' dàn</i>	<i>Ionmhuinn beul leis an dioltath dan,</i>
<i>Bho 'm bidh mnàth ri tilleadh ad chòir</i>	<i>Air am biodh na mnai ag toirbheart phog.</i>

<sup>80</sup> For examples see chapter 1, section c, sub-section: Repetition, lists and parallel structure. and this chapter section b, sub-section: Patterns of change in order of sequence and transposed material.

<sup>81</sup> See chapter 1, section c, *passim* and this chapter, section b, *passim*.

<sup>82</sup> SA 1953/34/A2 and *LF* pp.31-32 respectively.

18. *Bu duibhe na fithheadh t' fhalt*

*Bu ghuirme do shùil na learc  
'S deirg' e na crodh ban do bheul  
'S gur gile do dheud na a' chailc*

19. *B' airde do shleagh na crann siùil  
'S binne e na teud ciùil do ghuth*

*'S o chaidh d' aigheadh thar gach taoibh  
Bho churaidh riamh cha d' dh'iarr fois*

27. *Bu duibhe na 'm fiach a ghruag,  
Bu deirge a ghruiaidh na fuil-laogh;  
Bu mhine na cobhair an t sruth,  
Bu ghile na 'n sneachd corp Fhraoich.*

28. *Bu mhaise na 'n caisein fholt,  
Bu ghuirme a rosg na eir-leac  
Bu deirge na cruban a bheul  
'S bu ghile a dheud na chailc.*

29. *Bu treise na Còmhlà a sciath  
B'ìomad Triath a bhiodh r'a chul,  
Bu chomh-fhad a lamh 's a lann,  
Bu leine a chalb na clar luing;*

30. *B' airde shleagh na crann seoil  
Bu bhinne na teud cheol a ghuth  
Snamhuiche a b'fhear na Fraoch,  
Cha do leig riamh a thaobh re sruth.*

31. *Bu mhaith spionnadh a dha laimh,  
'S bu mhaith cail a dha chois;  
Chuaidh d' aigne thair gach Rìgh  
Roimh churaidh riamh cha diar fois!*

Like much of MacDonald's version, this episode has contracted. Gillies q.29 has dropped out entirely and qq.27 and 28 have been fused into one. Unusually, this involves the first line of q.27 and lines bcd of q.28 and thus there is no internal rhyme in the first couplet. Qq.30 and 31 have also been fused but show the more usual pattern of losing a couplet each (q.30cd and q.31ab). Most of the strongly visual imagery has been preserved, particularly those lines that contain descriptions including colour. The partial loss of qq.27 and 28 really represents a move towards greater economy since the colour imagery of the one quatrain virtually duplicates that of the other. The *dindshenchas*-

sequence that concludes the Gillies version (qq.33-34), which is neither descriptive nor essential, has been lost entirely.

A similar situation applies to the praise of the Dearg in the Eriskay variant of the ballad, here compared with an eighteenth century text from the McLagan collection:<sup>83</sup>

C.-W.113 (qq.7-9)	McLagan 113 (qq.7-10)
7. <i>Leum an laoch a b ailli dreach</i> <i>Mach a crannagan a luinge</i>	7. <i>Leum an Dearg bu mhath dreach</i> <i>Air tìr ri crannaibh a chraois</i> <i>Tharruing a bharc bu ghlain snaighe</i> <i>Air an trai' gheal ghainmhe</i>
<i>Bha fhalt fionna-bhui mar or deálarach</i> <i>Os cionn a dha mhalai nach dugh us gruai dhearg. // Os cionn mala gruai' an Deirg,</i>	8. <i>Folt fionn bhuigh mar or cearda</i>
8. <i>Bha dhearc shuil ghorm mar glaine</i> <i>Ann an gnuis mhacanta mhilidh.</i>	<i>A dha dhearc-shuil ghorm mar ghloin</i> <i>Bu ghlan gnuis a mhili.</i>
<i>Bha da shleagha reamhar chatha</i> <i>Ri gualain mhic an ard fhlaitha.</i>	9. <i>Bha dha shleagh cheann reamhar catha</i> <i>Ann laimh mic an ard-fhlatha</i> <i>Sgia òir air a ghualainn chli</i> <i>Aig Mac uasal an ard-riogh.</i>
9. <i>Lann nimheil gu liodairt chorp</i> <i>Air a laoch gun eagal coraig</i> <i>Bha dealbh chupa chlachara chorr</i> <i>Air a bhilean tartarach tas-gheal.</i>	10. <i>Lann nimhe ri leadart chorp</i> <i>Air an laoch gun eagal comhraig</i> <i>Mìn comata clochara corr</i> <i>Air a mhili shochar suil ghorm</i>

The loss of material that can be observed in this case involves loss of couplets but not adjacent ones which leads to the emergence of new quatrains with a new order of couplets. Since the metre involved here is *deibhidhe*-based the rhyme pattern is not affected. There are instances of difference in panegyric material but the majority of these are paralleled in other versions of the ballad. In two cases in the C.-W.113 passage, it

<sup>83</sup> The Eriskay passage is quoted from C.-W.113 and the McLagan text is found in manuscript 113 and printed in *Rel.Celt.* I; pp.345-352.

appears that an echo of lost material has led to a change in wording. Q.7b seems to echo the concept of McLagan 7c *a bharc* in its use of *a luinge* where a reference to a spear is expected; similarly, *gualain* in q.8d echoes the same word in McLagan q.9c in a situation where *làimh* would be the expected word. This anticipatory use would seem to indicate that at one time the missing couplets were indeed part of the Eriskay text.<sup>84</sup> The passage combines description of heroic behaviour with an account of the Dearg's personal beauty and his heroic equipment; again, there is considerable emphasis on visual imagery.

It could be argued that the main function of descriptive detail which provokes visualisation is to enable the audience to have a mental picture of a protagonist or of an event and thus to remain interested in the ballad. Reciters would have recognised this function of descriptive passages but this does not explain how so many instances of non-essential descriptive material survive relatively intact although there are of course versions where an originally long descriptive passage appears only in rudimentary form. It seems reasonable to suggest that there is a link between visual detail and memory.<sup>85</sup> Much of the visual material belongs to the Heroic Code and therefore has a significant formulaic dimension which is recognised to be important for the memorisation of oral texts. The visual element would seem to be a contributory factor in memorisation and successful recall of these passages. In this context, it is important to remember that visualisation as a mnemonic technique was used by twentieth century storytellers for prose tales although it is almost certain that the technique goes back far further in time. It seems that the visualised 'pictures' of the tale that passed through the storyteller's mind during his performance contained much detail comparable to the descriptive material in the ballads. The South Uist storyteller Donald Alasdair Johnson explained his technique in some detail to Donald Archie MacDonald in an interview following a recording of *An Tuaraisgeul Mór* in 1973. This includes the following passage:<sup>86</sup>

*DAM 'Neist 'nuair a bha sibh a' faicinn na ridirean a bha sen, ciamar a bha sibh 'ga faicinn-san?*

*DAJ Cha robh ach dìreach 'ga faicinn 'nan daoine cumanta, dìreach, ach gu faiceadh tu iad, gu robh iad dreaisde seach càch.*

<sup>84</sup> Evidence such as this may indicate that the MacCallum text the Eriskay Variant derives from was originally derived from an oral context.

<sup>85</sup> A. Bruford: *Gaelic Folk-Tales and Mediaeval Romances*; Dublin 1969; p.217.

<sup>86</sup> D.A. MacDonald: 'A Visual Memory' in: *Scottish Studies* 22 (1978); pp.4-5, translation p.16.

DAM Seadh. Seadh. 'S bhiodh aodach orra...?

DAJ 'S bhiodh an aodach orra. Bhitheadh. Chitheadh tu 'n t-aodach orra.

DAM Seach càch, gu-tà? Bhiodh aodach àraid orra?

DAJ Bhitheadh. Bha aodach àraid orra: striobaichean is rudan dhen t-seòrsa sin... Bhitheadh.

DAM Agus Ridire na Sgéithe Gile 's Ridire na Sgéithe Uaine...?

DAJ Bha. Bha sin-ach, bha iad mar gum biodh e ac' air an gualainn ann a sheo-ach, air... air tab... an dath.

DAM O 'sè dìreach: air a' ghualainn ann a shen?

DAJ Seadh.

DAM Seadh. Mar gum biodh sgrìob dhen dath, dìreach?

DAJ Seadh. Mar gum biodh sgrìob dhen dath ann... geal, na uaine, na dearg.

Visualised detail is, of course different from detail that invites visualisation although a link appears to exist between the two.<sup>87</sup> Another difficulty lies in the fact that while visualisation is a tool in recalling prose material it may be of less use in a poetic genre where mnemonic devices such as rhyme, alliteration, etc., play an important role. There is, however, at least one account of visualisation involved in the composition of poetry, going back to the poetess Mairearad nighean Lachlainn, probably a MacLean who flourished at the end of the seventeenth until the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>88</sup> Her method of composition is said to have involved '*a' feitheamh na bàrdachd a' ruith air na glasfhadan*' although the exact phrase was apparently transmitted by a twentieth century source.<sup>89</sup> It is difficult to determine what exactly the poetess saw running along the top of the walls of her house; since she is very likely to have operated in a purely oral environment she may have seen the images she used in her compositions. In this context, it is worth noting that Mairearad's poetry contains a great deal of material belonging to the Heroic Code which in itself has an important visual dimension.<sup>90</sup> The Heroic Code is, of course, also present in the ballads, and it may be significant in the present context that there is a strong link with complementary prose narrative as well, at least in later Scottish

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<sup>87</sup> Bruford, loc.cit.

<sup>88</sup> S. Mac Gill-eain (ed. W. Gillies): 'Mairearad nighean Lachlainn' in: *Ris a' Bhruthaich*; Stornoway 1985; pp.161-163.

<sup>89</sup> As quoted by J. MacInnes: 'The Oral Tradition in Scottish Gaelic Poetry' in: *Scottish Studies* 12 (1968); p.41.

<sup>90</sup> See also Mac Gill-eain, op.cit. pp.162-190 but especially pp.175-176.



tradition. Visualisation, while not the main mnemonic device of the ballad genre, may have played a contributory role in the complex processes of memorisation and recall; direct evidence for this, however, does not appear to be available.

### **Dynamics of metre**

As is to be expected after the transition of ballad texts from the bardic to the vernacular context, much of their original poetic artistry becomes attenuated. This is also true of ballads in an oral environment; in this case, however, it is possible to observe how change often employs the same aural devices to promote textual stability, for instance alliteration, that are found in the context of *ógláchas*.

### Length of lines

An important aspect of syllabic poetry which is largely ignored in later ballad tradition is the fixed number of syllables in a given metre. Although many lines can generally be observed to preserve the number of syllables of the original metre, and although lines may undergo change and still show the original number of syllables, hyper- and hypometric lines are a frequent occurrence in later tradition. A particularly striking example of this appears in the praise of the Dearg in the Eriskay variant of the ballad already quoted above.<sup>91</sup>

The C.-W.113 text has the following hypermetric lines: eight syllables - q.7b; nine syllables - q.9d; ten syllables - qq.7c, 8bcd, 9bc; eleven syllables - q.7d.<sup>92</sup> Only three lines have the expected seven syllables (qq.7a, 8a, and 9a). The McLagan text shows the following distribution: seven syllables as expected - qq.7ab, 8abc, 9bcd, 10a; eight syllables - qq.7c, 9a, 10bcd. There are also the following hypometric lines: six syllables - qq.7d, 8d. In the McLagan text, there is at least a theoretical possibility of an input from manuscript tradition to exert a stabilising influence on the metrical form of the ballad. This was no longer the case for the Eriskay text, recorded almost a century later in an oral context. The tendency to insert more syllables into lines can be observed in greater proliferation in a context of oral transmission. It seems reasonable to suggest that in this

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<sup>91</sup> See this chapter, section c, sub-section: Visuality and its role in the survival of non-essential material (Eriskay Dearg). The passage is not repeated here for reasons of space.

<sup>92</sup> The extremely unwieldy line 7d is, however, paralleled in other texts.

context comparative metrical strictness lost out to the need to tell a story in sufficient clarity.

The above quatrains show irregular length of lines in a scribal environment as well. The DF version (no.LXIII),<sup>93</sup> a text written in 1738 by the Irish scribe John Short,<sup>94</sup> a version in a collection made in Ireland for Donald Smith in 1798,<sup>95</sup> and a text in partly vernacularised Classical Gaelic found in the Scottish Ardchonaill manuscript of 1690 or 1691<sup>96</sup> show the following distribution patterns:<sup>97</sup>

syllables	DF LXIII	Short	Smith	Ardchonaill
6	---	10bc	---	7d 8d
7	7acd 8 9 10ab	7acd 8bd 9bcd 10ac	7a 8ad 9b 10bcd	7ac 8abc 9cd 10acd
8	7b 10cd	7b 8ac	7bcd 8bc 9ad 10a	7b 9ab 10b
9	---	9a	9c	---

It is clear that heptasyllabic variants exist for all lines except q.7b; they are, however, not found together in any one version. It is significant that despite differences in line length there is widespread verbal and motival agreement between the four sample texts and that the material implicated in creating hypermetric lines is not usually involved in metrical decoration.

### Metrical decoration

Of the metrical decoration of *ógláchas*, only rhyme and alliteration play a significant role in later ballad tradition; assonance and consonance may be present on occasion but appear to be of minor importance since they play only a subordinate role in *ógláchas* metres. Apart from displaying poetic artistry, both rhyme and alliteration fulfil the function of mnemonic devices and are less likely to be subject to textual change than words that are unconnected to either rhyming or alliterating words. Rhyme itself does no

<sup>93</sup> DF II, pp.298-317. For a discussion of the significance of irregular line length in the DF text, see DF III, pp.145-146.

<sup>94</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.5.

<sup>95</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.72.3.2.

<sup>96</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.72.1.36. and also printed in LF, pp.121-123.

<sup>97</sup> Compared to the Ardchonaill manuscript and other Scottish texts, DF, Short and Smith show qq.9 and 10 in reversed order.

longer conform to the rules of perfect rhyme of *dan díreach* but allows greater flexibility of rhyming words regarding consonantal material. *Deibhidhe*-based metres tend to preserve a *deibhidhe*-style rhyme pattern and *rannaigheacht*-based ones exhibit a *rannaigheacht*-style rhyme scheme. Not every instance of rhyme or other metrical decoration is preserved in later tradition although their stabilising influence can be observed in many instances, as in the following passage from the *deibhidhe*-based ballad of the Dearg;<sup>98</sup> end-rhyme is indicated in bold print, internal rhyme in small capitals, and alliteration is shown by underlining.

C.-W.113 (qq.7-9)

7. Leum an laoch a b ailli **dreach**  
Mach a crannagan a luinge

Bha fhalt FIONNA-bhui mar or deálarach  
Os CIONN a dha mhalai nach dugh us gruai dhearg. // Os CIONN mala gruai' an Deirg,

8. Bha dhearc SHUIL ghorm mar glaine  
Ann an GNUIS mhacanta mhilidh.

Bha da shleagha reamhar **chatha**  
Ri gualain mhic an **ard** **fhlatha**.

9. Lann nimheil gu liodairt **chorp**  
Air a laoch gun eagal **coraig**  
Bha dealbh chupa CHLACHARA chorr  
Air a bhilean TARTARACH tas-gheal.

McLagan 113 (qq.7-10)

7. Leum an Dearg bu mhath **dreach**  
Air tìr ri crannaibh a **chraois**<sup>99</sup>  
Tharruing a BHARC bu GHLAIN **snaighe**  
Air an TRAI' **GHEAL** **ghainmhe**

8. Folt FIONN bhuigh mar or cearda

A dha DHEARC-SHUIL ghorm mar ghloin  
Bu GHLAN GNUIS a mhìli.

9. Bha dha shleagh cheann reamhar **catha**  
Ann laimh mic an **ard**-**fhlatha**  
Sgia òir air a GHUALAINN **chlì**  
Aig Mac UASAL an **ard**-**riogh**.

10. Lann nimhe ri LEADART **chorp**  
Air an laoch gun EAGAL **comhraig**  
Mìn comata CLOCHARA **corr**  
Air a mhìli SHOCHAR **suil ghorm**

<sup>98</sup> Quoted from C.-W.113 and McLagan 113. See also this section, sub-section Visuality etc.

<sup>99</sup> There is end-rhyme in this line if *chraois* is emended to *chraoiseach* in analogy to other versions.

The end-rhymes are generally good or at least satisfactory where no textual development has taken place. In Eriskay q. 7, the rhyming words *craoiseach* in line b and *ceàrd* in line c have been replaced by words which are visually strong but do not provide rhyme. A similar situation applies in Eriskay q.8ab and its equivalent McLagan q.8cd where there is, however, much alliteration and internal rhyme. Eriskay q.9cd had lost its end-rhyme because the final line has been re-worked; the re-working, however, uses words which provide alliteration and internal rhyme. McLagan q.8ab shows a development from *gruaidh-dhearg* or a similar phrase which would have rhymed satisfactorily with *ceard(a)*; it is easy to see how the phrase developed to its present shape. Alliteration and internal rhyme are well represented in both passages.

Similar patterns of preservation and development are found in the praise of Fraoch, a ballad in *rannaigheacht mhór*-type metre.<sup>100</sup>

MacDonald (qq.17-19)

Gillies (qq.26-31)

<p>17. <i>Ionnmhainn tighearn 's ionnmhainn TUATH</i>  <i>Ionnmhainn GRUAIDH o'n deirge a' ròs</i>  <i>Ionnmhainn beul o'n deirg' DÀN</i>  <i>Bho 'm bidh MNÀTH ri tilleadh ad chòir</i></p>	<p>26. <i>Ionmhuinn Tighearn ionmhuinn TUATH,</i>  <i>Ionmhuinn GRUAIDH a's deirge ros,</i>  <i>Ionmhuinn beul leis an dioltath DAN,</i>  <i>Air am biodh na MNAI ag toirbheart phog.</i></p>
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18. *Bu duibhe na fitheadh t' fhalt*

27. *Bu DUIBHE na 'm fiach a GHRUAG,*  
*Bu deirge a GHRUIAIDH na FUIL-laogh;*  
*Bu MHINE na cobhair an t sruth,*  
*Bu GHILE na 'n sneachd corp Fhraoich.*

*Bu ghuirme do shùil na learc*  
*'S deirg' e na crodh ban do BHEUL*  
*'S gur gile do DHEUD na a' chailc*

28. *Bu mhaise na 'n caisein FHOLT,*  
*Bu ghuirme a ROSG na eir-leac*  
*Bu deirge na cruban a BHEUL*  
*'S bu ghile a DHEUD na chailc.*

<sup>100</sup> Quoted from SA 1953/34/A2 and LF pp.31-32. See also this section, sub-section Visuality and its role in the survival of non-essential material.

29. *Bu treise na Còmhlà a SCIATH*  
*B'ìomad TRIATH a bhiodh r'a **chul**,*  
*Bu chomh-fhad a LAMH 's a LANN,*  
*Bu leine a CHALB na CLAR **luing**;*

19. *B' airde do shleagh na crann SIÙIL*  
*'S binne e na teud CIÙIL do ghuth*

30. *B' airde shleagh na crann SEOIL*  
*Bu bhinne na teud CHEOL a **ghuth***  
*Snamhuiche a b'fhear na FRAOCH,*  
*Cha do leig riamh a THAOBH re **sruth**.*

31. *Bu mhaith spionnadh a dha LAIMH,*  
*'S bu mhaith CAIL a dha **chois**;*  
*'S o chaidh d' aigneadh thar gach taoibh*  
*Bho churaidh riamh cha d' dh'iarr fois*  
*Chuidh d' aigne thair gach Rìgh*  
*Roimh churaidh riamh cha diar **fois**!*

The end-rhymes are preserved in both passages with the exception of MacDonald q. 19, a composite quatrain which has lost the lines that made up the rhyme with *ghuth* and *fois* respectively. Similarly, most internal rhymes have been preserved except in the case of MacDonald q. 18ab, again because of its composite nature, and MacDonald q.19cd and its equivalent Gillies 31cd; Gillies qq.27cd may intend the internal rhyme *sruth* : *corp* but this is not entirely satisfactory. Gillies qq. 27 and 29 even show internal rhyme beyond the required minimum. Alliteration, not a required feature of *ógláchas* of *rannaigheacht mhór*, is rare in both passages. An unusual feature is present in Gillies qq.28a and 31d where there is a phenomenon much like rhyme in *maise* and *caisein* and *riamh* and *diar* respectively; this appears intentional and may have contributed to the preservation of these lines without change because of its striking aural effect.

In the above examples, loss and verbal development have resulted in the deterioration of the rhyme scheme. There are also instances where textual change is accompanied by new rhyme, as in a version of the ballad of the Dearg in the Irish manuscript RIA 3 B 28, here compared with its equivalent in DF LXIII:<sup>101</sup>

<sup>101</sup> See also this chapter, section b, sub-section: Elaborative innovation.

DF LXIII q.6cd  
*Tainic BÁRC in fir mhóir*  
*ar in TRACHT fa a cceartchomair*

RIA 3 B 28 q.9cd  
*An trath bo lionmhar lán*  
*Triallus an Dearg na gcomhdail.*

The *deibhidhe*-type end-rhyme is good in both couplets and there is also internal rhyme in DF. Some alliteration is found in both couplets and assonance may be intended between *lionmhar* and *triallus* in 3 B 28. Such attention to metrical detail would seem to suggest that the 3 B 28 couplet came into existence in an environment where the requirements of *ógláchas* were still understood and imitated. Both couplets describe the landing of the Dearg at Binn Éadair although the images differ. DF states that the Dearg's boat came ashore immediately in front of the watchers whom the first couplet of the quatrain is concerned with; 3 B 28 reports that the Dearg came to meet them at high tide. Of the two, the DF image is the more directly visual one since it invites visualisation of the boat's landing, the hero, and the scene on the beach. By contrast, 3 B 28 only has the general image of high tide and the Dearg's arrival although this may evoke quite detailed visualisation among listeners in a coastal community.

Rhymes can be preserved while the wording is changed around them. A quatrain from the combat sequence between Goll and the pursuer in Scottish texts of *Eas Ruaidh* shows almost complete agreement in end- and internal rhyme of *rannagheacht mhór*-style while otherwise some verbal development can be observed. The following examples are found in Donald MacNicol's version of c. 1750 and a text collected by Alexander Carmichael in 1860 from the South Uist reciter Patrick Smith:<sup>102</sup>

MacNicol q.30  
*Bha claignin soc ri SOC,*  
*Re lioddairt CHORP & sciath;*  
*Tinnil catha bh' aig an DEISS,*  
*Cha 'n fhacas RIS roibh riabh.*

Smith q.24  
*Bha claidhmhean aca ri SOC,*  
*Ri suathadh CHLOGAD a's sgiath;*  
*An t-alt comhraig bh' aig an DIS*  
*Cha'n fhacas roimh na RITHIS riamh.*

The only change in rhyme involves *chorp* and *chlogad* in line b, resulting in a less than satisfactory rhyme. The verbal differences involve near-synonyms which do not greatly affect the visual dimension of the scene.

<sup>102</sup> LF pp.130-131 and NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. respectively.



In instances where rhyme changes, it appears to be more likely that verbal changes appear as well, as in another q. from Scottish texts of *Eas Ruaidh* where the lady describes her pursuer to Fionn. The following examples are from MacNicol and from a version collected in 1782 by the Rev. Patrick Graham of Aberfoyle from Daniel Kerr:<sup>103</sup>

MacNicol q.11	Kerr q.8
<i>Ta ga 'm Bheor-uidh ruagidh air MUIR,</i>	<i>Feuchaibh air mo chul, air MUIR</i>
<i>Laoch bo bhor GUIN air mo <b>lorg</b>;</i>	<i>Fear, - agus garbh DHUIN air mo <b>lorg</b>;</i>
<i>Mac Riogh na Sorcha 's geur AIRM,</i>	<i>Mac Rìgh Sorcha nan SGIATH 'n AIRM,</i>
<i>Neach thin da 'm b' AINM Maighre <b>Borb</b>.</i>	<i>TRIATH dan goirte am MAIGHRE <b>Borb</b>.</i>

The end-rhyme is preserved but in the internal rhyme there is some variation, including the rather unsatisfactory *airm* : *Maighre* in Kerr. Despite the greater verbal divergence the same ideas are expressed and it appears that the two quatrains are to be seen as borderline cases regarding the question whether the actual image changes or not, particularly in the first couplet.

## Section d: Dynamics of Heroic Code and Formulaic Material

Material pertaining to the Heroic Code has several interconnected functions within the ballads. One is the provision of suitable motifs and imagery to describe heroes, an heroic backdrop to events, or heroic action itself. Its presence within a poetic context suggests a certain mnemonic dimension as well; the preservation of heroic imagery through transmissional processes would seem to confirm its mnemonic value. From the above examples<sup>104</sup> it would appear that the connection between the aural devices employed by metre and the generally visual or evocative quality of the imagery of the Heroic Code is likely to promote textual stability. At the same time, the diverse requirements of different metres demand a large and adaptable pool of motifs which

<sup>103</sup> *LF* pp.130-131 and NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.13. respectively.

<sup>104</sup> See this chapter, section c, sub-section: Dynamics of metre.

appear likely to encourage a degree of textual variation. Here, poetic decoration seems to fulfil a stabilising function although at a later stage of tradition, particularly in Scotland, it appears that the substitution of an image for a near-equivalent can occur without necessarily fitting into the rhyme scheme. Thus MacNicol's *Eas Ruaidh* couplet already quoted<sup>105</sup> is paralleled in the nineteenth century manuscript C.-W.280:

MacNicol q.11cd	C.-W.280 q.11cd
<i>Mac Riogh na Sorch</i> 's <i>geur</i> <i>AIRM</i> ,	<i>Mac Righ Sorch</i> nan <i>SGIATH</i> <i>dearg</i>
<i>Neach thin da 'm b' AINM</i> <i>Maighre Borb</i> .	<i>TRIATH g' an ainm am Boighre Borb</i> .

Both couplets employ weapon imagery but only MacNicol provides a good internal rhyme. In such cases, it appears that the striking image takes precedence over the aural device of rhyme.<sup>106</sup>

### Motival stability

Heroic imagery generally displays a high degree of motival stability. Few images are likely to be preserved in all extant versions of a ballad although motifs that were probably part of the original version of a text and therefore already partly stabilised by metrical relationships can be found in unaltered or similar form in a significant proportion of texts. The ballad of the *Dearg* provides ample evidence for the stability and the amount of development present in a selection of Irish and Scottish versions.

On the Irish side, the following texts have been examined: DF LXIII (seventeenth century),<sup>107</sup> John Short (early eighteenth century),<sup>108</sup> Donald Smith (late eighteenth century),<sup>109</sup> Ó Siochfhradha's composite text,<sup>110</sup> and a selection of RIA manuscripts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>105</sup> See *ibid*.

<sup>106</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Heroic Code, see chapter 1, section b.

<sup>107</sup> DF II, pp.298-317.

<sup>108</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.5.

<sup>109</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.72.3.2.

<sup>110</sup> Ó Siochfhradha, *Laoithe na Féinne*, pp.130-136.

<sup>111</sup> These are RIA 23 O 35, 24 L 27, 12 I 16, 24 L 18, 24 L 7, 24 L 15, 23 O 33, 24 A 17, 3 B 9, F VI 2, 23 D 19, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, 24 B 18, 24 P 7, 23 L 8, and 3 B 28.

Scottish texts include the following: a manuscript of Peter Turner's (c.1800),<sup>112</sup> the Ardchonaill manuscript of 1690-1691,<sup>113</sup> McLagan 113 (mid-eighteenth century),<sup>114</sup> Donald MacNicol's text of c.1755,<sup>115</sup> the Rev. Alexander Campbell of Portree's version of c.1797,<sup>116</sup> an undated and unprovenanced text in the MacKinnon collection,<sup>117</sup> Eobhan MacDiarmaid's version of c.1770,<sup>118</sup> a text collected by Sir John Sinclair around 1800,<sup>119</sup> a Kintyre text collected by Malcolm MacDonald from the schoolmaster of Whitehouse, a certain McMurphy, in the mid-or late nineteenth century,<sup>120</sup> a version collected by Sir George MacKenzie in the early nineteenth century,<sup>121</sup> two texts from Duncan Kennedy's late eighteenth century collections,<sup>122</sup> and the Eriskay versions from the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>123</sup> Among the Scottish texts, distinct patterns of relationship are evident between Ardchonaill and McLagan 113, between MacNicol, Campbell, MacDiarmaid, and MacKinnon, between Sinclair and McMurphy, and between the Eriskay versions. These relationships are also strongly reflected in the heroic imagery and the material itself falls into several categories.

Taking the oldest text, DF LXIII, as a starting point for comparison, a few examples emerge of material that survives without change. Texts which agree with DF have not been noted specifically:

- DF q.1c Aithreos caithréim **in fir móir**
- DF q.3b Triallus **in Dearg mac Droichil** (some variation exists in the patronymic; no equivalents in Sinclair and McMurphy; couplet lost in 12 I 16)
- DF q.5b Ag coiméd **in chúain chobhairbháin** (line lost in 12 I 16)
- DF q.7d Ar **in tracht gheal ghainmhidhe** (no equivalents in RIA 3 B 28, Kennedy, Sinclair, McMurphy, and the Eriskay texts)<sup>124</sup>

<sup>112</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.7.

<sup>113</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.72.1.36. and LF pp.121-123.

<sup>114</sup> Rel.Celt. I, pp.345-352.

<sup>115</sup> LF pp.108-109.

<sup>116</sup> Rel.Celt. I, pp.202-207.

<sup>117</sup> EUL MacKinnon collection (1924), Box 9, no.4.

<sup>118</sup> D.S. Thomson (ed. and tr.): The MacDiarmaid Manuscript Anthology, Edinburgh 1991 (SGTS); pp.166-191.

<sup>119</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.16.

<sup>120</sup> C.-W.45.

<sup>121</sup> Rel.Celt. I, pp.422-424.

<sup>122</sup> LF, pp.109-112.

<sup>123</sup> C.-W.113, its copy C.-W.358, and C.-W.263 respectively.

<sup>124</sup> In most cases, versions have no equivalents to the motif in question because of loss of text.

Even in this short list, two of the motifs have dropped out of a number of versions. The appearance of motifs without any change in all texts of the sample is a relatively rare phenomenon and it is likely that a greater sample of texts may result in producing some variation even in the above motifs.

It is more common for motifs that are preserved in many versions to be counterbalanced by change in a few texts. Examples are:

- DF q.23c *Mac righ na Feine gan tár* > RIA 24 L 18 and 24 B 18 ...*gan tlais*; RIA 24 L 27, 23 L 8, and 3 B 28 ...*nar thár*; McLagan,<sup>125</sup> MacNicol, MacKenzie ...*gu sàr* (no equivalents in the Eriskay texts)
- DF q.39a *Mur do chonnairc airdri Teamhra* > Ó Siochfhradha, RIA 23 O 33, 24 A 17, 3 B 9, F VI 2 ... *an t-Árd-righ*; RIA 24 B 18, 24 P 7, 23 O 35, 24 L 7, 24 L 15, 23 D 19, Short, Smith, Turner, McLagan, Sinclair, McMurphy ...*triath (na) Teamhra*; RIA 12 I 16, 24 L 18 ...*ard Riogh Teamhra*; MacKenzie ...*an Righ teann righ / Teamhr* (no equivalents in RIA 3 B 28, 23 L 8, 24 L 27, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, MacNicol, Campbell, MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid, and the Eriskay texts)
- DF q.39d *Co mac Cumhaill na mor sluagh* > Ó Siochfhradha, RIA 3 B 9, F VI 2, 23 D 19 ...*arm-ruaidh*; Short ... *na ttromslúagh*; McMurphy ...*nam mòr-chuach* (no equivalents in RIA 3 B 9, 23 L 8, 24 L 27, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, Campbell, MacKinnon, Macdiarmaid, and the Eriskay texts)
- DF q.60c *Ag snoighe chlogad is cheann* > Short and Turner ...*chlogad agus lann*; MacNicol ...*chlogad is sgiath* (no equivalents in RIA 3 B 28, 23 L 8, 23 O 35, 24 L 27, 24 L 18, 23 C 26, MacKenzie, Kennedy, Sinclair, McMurphy, and the Eriskay texts)

Such change does not normally affect the logic of the plot but metrical requirements are not always met by the above examples.

Shared motifs can be useful in determining the relationships that exist between different versions. Examples of change which is paralleled in related texts is found in the following examples.

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<sup>125</sup> The alternative *gun tàir* is given.

- DF q.13d *D' Fíanuibh lánuaisle Eirinn* > Ó Siochfhradha, RIA 23 O 33, 24 A 17, 3 B 9, F VI 2, 23 D 19 *D' fholuibh uaisle na h-Eirionn*; MacNicol, Campbell, MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid *A dhionadh lan uaislean (na h-) Eirinn*;<sup>126</sup> Sinclair and McMurphy *Do chinneadh lan uasail Eirinn*; Eriskay *Do dh'fhiantaibh ard uaibhreach Albain*; MacKenzie *Dh' fhiannuibh slan mhoughs Eirinn*; Kennedy *Do dh'uaisle maithibh fiann Fhinn*
- DF q.24c *Gur ceangail ger cródha an céim* > most Irish texts, Turner ...*cruaidh an céim*; Ardchonaill and McLagan ...*cruaidh an ceum*; Campbell, MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid ...*le cruaidh bheum* and ... *bu chruaidh am feum* (also MacKenzie); Sinclair and McMurphy ...'s *bu mhòr/ghurbh am baoghal*; Eriskay ...*le cruaidh bheum an Deirg*
- DF q.33d *Innis a laoich moirmheanmnaigh* > Ó Siochfhradha... *a laoich mheanmnaigh*; RIA 12 I 16 ...*a laoich ro-mheaneamh*; RIA 24 L 27, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, 3 B 28, 23 L 8 *A laoich go mbuadh nainbhíos*; RIA 23 O 33, 24 A 17, 3 B 9, F VI 2 ...*damhsa a laoich lainn*; RIA 24 B 18, 24 P 7, 23 O 35, 24 L 18, 24 L 7, 24 L 15, Short, Smith, Turner ...*a laoich làn mheanmnaigh*; Kennedy ...*laoich mhóir thruid/ ...laoich mhor mhilidh*; Sinclair and McMurphy ...*laoich ùr armaich*; Eriskay ...*a laoich iomalain* (no equivalents in RIA 23 D 19 and Mackenzie)
- DF q.44d *Pog is cuirm a tigh Teamhrach* > RIA 23 L 8, 3 B 28, 24 L 27, 23 C 26 ...*macaibh Teamhrach*; RIA 12 I 16, 24 L 7 ...*a dtigh Chormaic* (no equivalents in Kennedy, Sinclair, McMurphy, and the Eriskay texts)

The related texts show agreement in the changed material although there are cases where further change has taken place in related texts. For this reason, other distinctive textual developments have to be taken into account as well to determine whether and how closely texts are related.

Where change has taken place, it often involves the substitution of near-equivalents or alliterating words, for instance:

- DF q.4a *Ar ttiacht a ttir don laoch lonn* (in most Irish texts) > RIA 24 B 18 *Air na tteacht cugain anall*;<sup>127</sup> Ardchonaill, McLagan, Sinclair, McMurphy, Eriskay ...*on*

<sup>126</sup> Some minor variation exists in this line.

<sup>127</sup> *Don laoch* begins the following line.

/do'n *laoch làn*; MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid, Kennedy ...do'n *laoch lom* (no equivalents in RIA 23 O 35, 12 I 16, 24 L 27, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, 3 B 28, 23 L 8, MacNicol, and MacKenzie)

- DF q.7a *Leimis an Dearg fa maith dreach* (in most Irish texts) > RIA 12 I 16 ...*fa gille dreach*; RIA 24 B 18 ...*fa dheal dreach*; RIA 24 L 27, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, 3 B 28, 23 L 8 ...*fa dearg dreach*; Short, Turner ...*fa deas dreach*; MacNicol ...*an laoch fa theintidh dreich*; Campbell, MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid ...*an laoch a b'fheàrr tlachd*; MacKenzie ...*an laoch bu ghlaire dreach*; Eriskay ...*an laoch a b' àille dreach* (no equivalents in Sinclair and McMurphy)
- DF q.10a *Da shleidh crannríghne chatha* > Ó Siochfhradha, RIA 23 O 35, 24 L 27, 24 L 15, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, 24 B 18, 3 B 28, 23 L 8, Smith, *Dha chraoiseach chrannreamhra ccatha*; RIA 23 O 33, 24 L 18, 24 A 17, 3 B 9, F VI 2, 23 D 19, Short, Turner *Dha shleagh crann reamhra (chum) chatha*; RIA 12 I 16 *A dao chron rabhar Cruisi an catha*; RIA 24 L 7 *Da chraoiseach cheannreamhra chatha*; RIA 24 P 7 *Da chraoisigh craosamhra chatha*; Ardchonaill *Da leicion reamhara chatha*; MacNicol *Bha dha sleigh chrann-reibhir chath*; Campbell *Bha dha shleadh cheamh reamhir chath*; MacDiarmaid *Bha dhà shleagh chreamh-reamhar chath*; MacKenzie *Da shleagh craimhe reamhar catha*; Kennedy *Bha dha shleagh reamhar gu sgathadh*; Eriskay *Bha dha shleagha reamhar chatha* (no equivalents in MacKinnon, Sinclair, and McMurphy)
- DF q.53b *Ar a ccneasuibh cruithgheala* > Ó Siochfhradha, RIA 24 L 7, 3 B 9, F VI 2, Short, Smith. Turner *Ina gcorpaibh cneas-gheala*; RIA 23 O 35, 24 L 15 *ina ccorpaibh coimhgheala*; RIA 24 L 18 *Ar chorpaihb caoine croibh gheala*; RIA 24 B 18 *Na ccorpaibh caoimhe coimhdhealbha*; MacNicol, MacKenzie ...*an corpaibh caomha cneas-gheala*; Campbell, MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid ...*an corpaibh caomhgheala*; Eriskay ...*an corpa seimhe geala* (no equivalents RIA 12 I 16, 24 L 27, 23 O 33, 24 A 17, 23 D 19, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, 24 P 7, 3 B 28, 23 L 8, Ardchonaill, McLagan, Kennedy, Sinclair, and McMurphy)

Again, many of the changes appear to favour alliterating words although in the case of some of the near-equivalents metrical requirements are disregarded in favour of preserving the sense of the line.

Occasionally, changes that diverge thematically can occur, as in the following examples:



- DF q.3a *Fa thasg na fFían dob fearr gail* (most other texts have *goil*)> Ó Siochfhradha ...*fa maith guil*; MacNicol, MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid ...*as mòr goil*; Campbell ...*bu mhor fliadh*; MacKenzie ...*is gairbh ghail*; Kennedy ...*'s bu gharg a lon*; Eriskay ...*bu mhor a ghloir* (no equivalents in RIA 12 I 16, Sinclair, and McMurphy). The original motif described a particular heroic attitude while its substitute motifs deal with generosity, weaponry (assuming *lann* for Kennedy's *lon*), and heroic reputation.
- DF q.26a *Sgaoílius an Dearg na ccleas bfráoch* > Ó Siochfhradha, RIA 23 O 33, 24 A 17, 3 B 9, F VI 2, 23 D 19 ...*na nglas ngéar*; RIA 24 L 27, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, 3 B 28, 23 L 8 ...*na ttreas ttéan*; RIA 24 L 18 ...*na ttreas fíoch*; Ardchonaill, McLagan ...*nan arm fiadhaich*; MacNicol ...*'s nior threis Fiach*; Campbell, MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid ...*'s ni tre fíoch*; MacKenzie ...*an curaidh an treas fiach*; Kennedy ...*bu mhor neart*; Sinclair ...*gun dàil fa sgaòl*; Eriskay ... *le mor chiall* (no equivalent in McMurphy). The equivalent motifs of heroic feats are paralleled by images of weaponry, strength, a reference to the action in the quatrain (Sinclair), and heroic attitude.
- DF q.48b *A laochradh leidmheach Laighean* > RIA 23 O 33, 24 A 17, F VI 2, 23 D 19 *Cinn laochra na h-Almhuinne /ó Almhuinn*; RIA 3 B 9 *Cinn na bhfear ó Almhuinn*; RIA 12 I 16 *A laoichibh Riogh theach Laighin*; Ardchonaill *A laochradh a shleibhte Laighean*; McLagan, MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid *A laoich(aibh) le ar claidheamh còmhraig*; MacNicol *A laochidh le 'r claighin solluist*; Campbell *Laoich le'r n'armabh comhrag*; Sinclair ...*a thriath Rìgh èishe catha*; Eriskay *Fhearaibh le nairm faobhar grinn* (no equivalents in RIA 24 L 18, MacKenzie, Kennedy, and McMurphy). The alliterating place name motif has undergone considerable development from the original address of the assembled Fian to an address of Fionn, complete with location-cheville *na h-Almhaine* in some instances. Ardchonaill replaces the panegyric adjective with another locational reference while some other versions replace the image with a weaponry motif; MacNicol's sword-of-light motif has a folktale connection.
- DF q.58a *Do chuaidh Goll nár fulaing tár* > RIA 24 L 27, 23 C 26, 23 M 2, 3 B 29, 23 L 8 ...*nach fulaing tath*; RIA 12 I 16 ...*nach fulling ar*; MacNicol, Campbell, MacKinnon, MacDiarmaid ...*Mac Morna*; Sinclair *Chaidh Goll a chulaidh chruaidh*; Eriskay ...*Goll nan cruadh bheuma* (no equivalents in Mackenzie and

MacMurphy) The common image of a particular heroic attitude has been replaced by the motifs of battle armour, heroic ability, and a simple patronymic.

It is obvious even from the limited range of motifs above that overlap is possible between the different categories of change, particularly in a large sample of texts. Similar observations can be made in all ballads. Texts from an oral context are likely to display a greater amount of change and more divergence in textual development than texts that have been transmitted in a predominantly scribal context although a certain amount of motival development can be found here as well.

### **Stock motifs or episodes**

#### Killing of large numbers of opponents

A number of motifs or episodes appear in a similar form in several different ballads. The banner-quatrains, for instance, are found in a number of invader-ballads and the Eriskay variant of the Dearg.<sup>128</sup> Quatrains that deal with the numbering of slain warriors are a frequent part of combat sequences in various ballads. In the Gillies text of *Teanntachd Mhór na Féinne*,<sup>129</sup> four such quatrains appear which are closely paralleled in Irish texts of the ballad, usually entitled *Laoidh Airghinn Mhóir mhic Angcairt na Long*.<sup>130</sup>

Gillies qq.27-28 and 59-60  
27. *Naoi fichead is míle sonn*  
*Thuit sud le Garaidh 's le Goll,*  
*O na dh' eirich a Ghrian moch*  
*Gus an deachaidh i siar anmoch.*

Ó Siochfhradha qq.44, 45, and 47  
44. *Seacht bhfichid is míle sonn*  
*Do thuit le Garradh is le Goll*  
*Ó d'éirigh ab ghrian go moch*  
*Go ndeachaidh sí siar an-mhoch.*

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<sup>128</sup> See also this chapter, section b, sub-section: Accretion.

<sup>129</sup> LF pp.101-103.

<sup>130</sup> Ó Siochfhradha: *Laoithe na Féinne*; pp.176-180.

28. *Seachd fichead do chlannaibh Rìgh,  
Ga 'm bu dual gaisg' is mor ghnìomh,  
Thuit sud le Osgar an aigh  
Is le Cairioll Corra-chnamh.*

45. *Seacht bhfichid de chlanna ríogh  
Ba mhór gaisceadh agus gníomh,  
Do thuit sud le hOscar an áigh  
Le Cairreall is le Conán.*

59. *Seachd cathai do bharr an t-sluaigh  
Thuit sud le Oscar na 'm buadh,  
'S an naonar mac a bh' aig Manus Ruadh.*

47. *Seacht gcatha de bharr an tsluaigh  
Do thuit le hOscar na mbuadh;*

. . . . .<sup>131</sup>

60. *Seachd fichead agus mìle sonn  
Thuit sud eadar Conan is Goll;  
Ach Mac Cumhaill 's a shluagh garg,  
Mar chaor theine na 'm mor fhearg;*

*Acht mac Cumhaill 's a shluagh garg  
Mar chaor theine 'n mórfearg.*

A corresponding sequence is found in many of the Scottish Variant *Cath Gabhra* texts, for instance in Macfarlane's collection:<sup>132</sup>

Macfarlane qq.16-21

*Mungan mac Seircein a h uaidh  
A dh' ionga' cuig ceud claidhe' cruaidh',  
Thuit sud air laimh Osgair thall  
'S è mosgla' gu rìgh na h Eirionn.*

*Seachd fichead do dh' fhearaibh bogha  
Thainig oirn, 's cha b' ann 'g ar cabhair,  
Thuit sud air laimh Osgair thall  
'S è mosgla' gu rìgh na h Eirionn.*

<sup>131</sup> A missing line is indicated in LF.

<sup>132</sup> *Rel.Celt.* pp.282-286.

*Seachd fichead do dh' fhearaibh feachd  
Thainig a tìr fhuair an t sneachd,  
Thuit sud air laimh Osgair thall  
'S è mosgla' gu rìgh na h Eirionn.*

*Seachd fichead Albannach àrd  
Thainig th' air muir ghaidheal gharbh,  
Thuit sud air laimh Osgair thall  
'S è mosgla' gu rìgh na h Eirionn.*

*Seachd fichead Cairble ruadh  
Do mhaithibh 's do mhòr uaislibh an t-sluaigh  
Thuit sud air laimh Osgair thall  
'S è mosgla' gu rìgh na h Eirionn.*

*A chuignear a b' fhaigse do 'n rìgh  
'S air leam gum bu mhòr an gnìomh,  
Thuit sud air laimh Osgair thall  
'S è mosgla' gu rìgh na h Eirionn.*

The various protagonists engaged in the slaughter in the *Teanntachd Mhór...* passages are paralleled by the lone figure of Osgar in the Macfarlane passage who is the main hero of the Scottish Variant. The final quatrain of this sequence in particular is closely related to Gillies q.28 above and is even closer in agreement to Gillies' A text of the Scottish Variant and versions derived from Gillies A.<sup>133</sup> Some pointers exist to help determine whether the passage in the Scottish Variant or the one in *Teanntachd Mhór...* is the older one since one is obviously modelled on the other. The DF version of *Teanntachd Mhór...*, LXVII, *La da raibh Padraig an Dún*, may date to the fifteenth or the sixteenth century but does not contain the relevant quatrains which therefore are likely to be a later accretion.<sup>134</sup> Metrical conditions suggest a similar conclusion since the quatrains are in a *deibhidhe*-based metre, fitting into the Scottish Variant, while the

<sup>133</sup> LF pp.191-193. See also chapter6, section c, sub-section: *Chan abair mi mo thriath ri m' cheòl* (Gillies' (A) and MacPhie's texts of *Chan abair...*)

<sup>134</sup> DF III; p.164. The text is in DF II; pp.362-369.

rest of *Teanntachd Mhór*... is modelled on *rannaigheacht mhór*. Internal evidence of the Scottish Variant passage indicates a relatively late genesis and at least some of the material may have been composed in a Scottish context. Q.17 introduces a band of archers, and bows and arrows feature significantly as Scottish heroic motifs but are scarce in an Irish context. The troop from the Land of Snow would appear to have come in from the context of the folktale.

The killing of large numbers of opponents is a stock motif present in other ballads as well, for instance in two episodes of the DF version of the Dearg which are paralleled in many of the versions of the ballad. The seeming agreement between q.50 and Macfarlane above is probably coincidental.<sup>135</sup>

DF qq.38 and 50

*Dob é iomthus mhic righ na fFionn*

*Thuit an cédsin 'na comlann*

*Is da chéd oile fa gníomh dhó*

*Do chlaoí an Deirg a n-enló*

*Do thuit Conán mac in Léith*

*Leis 7 in Dorn nár threith*

*Do chlaoí réna laim gan locht*

*Trí c[h]éd feargach faobarnocht.*

#### Prolonged recovery

The concept of a hero's prolonged recovery after an arduous fight is another motif which is shared by many ballads. The Dearg has an instance of such a quatrain, here quoted from the DF version but paralleled in other versions:

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<sup>135</sup> DF II; pp.298-317.

DF q.64

*Othar blíadhna luidhe Guill*

*Ó chomhrac in laóich luinn*

*I ttigh rígh Teamhra go bfios*

*Baoí mac Morna dha leighios*

Osgar is the recuperating protagonist in two instances in DF LXII, *Lá do bhí sealg Shléibhe Guilleann*.<sup>136</sup>

DF LXII q.102 and 105

*Sgela Osgair 'na deaghaidh dhuit*

*Do brigh chosgair in chomhrúic*

*Bádar leagha Eireann faris*

*Ré feadh bliadhna da leighius*

*Baoí Osgar ba cuimhneach linn*

*Ón lása Shleibhe Guilleann*

*tri ráithe 'na luidhe abhus*

*Ó nimh a chrecht da leighius*

Although these quatrains are all in the same *deibhidhe*-style metre there does not appear to be a direct textual relationship except for the parallel ending of the final line of each quatrain. Goll appears in a similar quatrain in *Eas Ruaidh*, this time in a *rannaigheacht mhór* based metre and quoted from the eighteenth century Sage collection.<sup>137</sup>

Sage q.22

*Dh'fhag e bliana(?) 'n a luighe Goll*

*Laoch sin nach bu tim an cath*

*Mac Muirne,<sup>138</sup> gu deimhin leinn*

*Dha leitheas (sic) aig Fionn nam flath.*

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<sup>136</sup> DF II; pp.248-297.

<sup>137</sup> *Rel.Celt.* pp.376-378.

<sup>138</sup> *Mac Moirne* is probably an error for *Mac Morna*.



A final instance of an account of a hero's healing is found in Gillies' *Laoidh Laomuinn mhic an Uaimhfhir*, also in a *rannaigheacht mhór*-based metre but this time referring to Osgar.<sup>139</sup>

Gillies q.25

*Seachd ràthain do 'n Almhain uir  
Ga leigheas ann cuirt na 'n Gall,  
'S cha dubhairt Oscar aich no iòd,  
Ge h-ioma cnead a bha ann.*

These quatrains would seem to draw mostly on the tradition of Fionn's special ability as a healer which appears in a much more sinister form in some of the Diarmaid-ballads; the DF quatrains involve the physicians of Ireland or the king of Tara rather than Fionn.

#### Final fight

The duration of the final fight between two heroes is another frequent motif. It appears in some Scottish versions of *Teanntachd Mhór na Féinne*, for instance Jerome Stone's mid-eighteenth century text:<sup>140</sup>

Stone q.22

*Ochd oidhchean dhuinn' is Ochd La  
A Sior chuir ar air an t-sluagh  
Ceann Riogh Lochlan na'n Sgiath donn  
Mhaoidha le Goll an naodhamh La.*

The metre of this quatrain is modelled on *rannaigheacht mhór* but *deibhidhe* examples exist to fit into this metrical context, as in Archibald Fletcher's version of *Conn mac an Deirg* where the appropriate quatrain runs:<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> LF; pp.106-107.

<sup>140</sup> TGS I 14; pp.334-338.

<sup>141</sup> LF; pp.114-115.

Fletcher q.45

*La agus aon tra deug,  
A chum iad comhrag is ni' m breug;  
Gun do bhuithin Goll nam beuman,  
Ceann a Chuinn mhoir air lòm eigin.*

The quatrain is not part of all versions of *Conn mac an Deirg* although the motif is present in most versions of the Dearg to which *Conn mac an Deirg* is indebted for inspiration as well as some actual material. The DF version runs:<sup>142</sup>

DF q.62

*Ona ccomrac re tri lá  
Fa tuirrsioch mic & mná  
Nó gur torchradh in Dearg ann  
Ré mac Morna na mbeimionn.*

It is possible to observe a relationship between the three quatrains. The Scottish ones explicitly tell of the enemy's beheading by Goll while Fletcher and DF both have the epithet *nam beuman* attached to Goll who is named by his patronymic in DF. There is, however, no agreement given for the duration of the fight. This is in keeping with ballad tradition in general where numbers often have a formulaic function but are easily interchangeable.<sup>143</sup> The quatrain belongs to the 'standard' versions of the text only in the Dearg; in the case of the other two ballads, it is only found occasionally.

### **Floating quatrains**

There are instances of entire quatrains which are found in corresponding contexts in different ballads. Similar to any other passage, textual development can be observed in such quatrains, especially in a predominantly oral environment. One such quatrain appears in combat sequences and describes how two opponents raise three showers during fighting; the shower of blood is an obvious consequence of the action; the shower

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<sup>142</sup> DF II; pp.298-317.

<sup>143</sup> For examples, see the initial examples in this sub-section (Gillies and Ó Siochfhradha).

of chalk rises from their shields; and the shower of fire accompanies the clash of their weapons. Triplication is joined by some alliteration and the quatrain has a highly formulaic feel about it. In an Irish context, it is found in DF LXII, *Lá do bhí sealg Shléibhe Guilleann*, in a sequence of combat between Osgar and an invader-figure named Dubh mac Diorfaidh:<sup>144</sup>

DF LXII q.92

*Cioth fola cioth cailce crúaidh*

*Baoí da ccorpaibh a n-enúair*

*7 cioth teineadh go nimh*

*Do bhí d'armoibh na mhíleadh.*

In a Scottish context, the quatrain is found in a number of versions of the Dearg and in some texts of *Conn mac an Deirg*. In the Dearg, the quatrain is incorporated into the fight between Goll and the Dearg (Ardchonaill, McLagan 113) or into the combat between Faolan and the Dearg (MacNicol, Campbell, MacKinnon, and MacDiarmaid) and may therefore be considered one of the distinguishing elements in determining patterns of relationship. Campbell's version exhibits some instances of typical textual development but is close to the DF quatrain at the same time:<sup>145</sup>

Campbell q.48

*Gi' falladh, gi' cailceadh cruaidh,*

*Bhiodh dhe **sciathain** san uair,*

*Agus gi' teinn' gu **neali'***

*Bhiodh **lannamh** no Mili'.*

The changes that have taken place involve heroic imagery but do not affect the actual contents of the quatrain.

Some reworking has taken place in *Conn mac an Deirg* but the relationship with the two previous examples is still evident, as in MacNicol's text:<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> DF II; pp.248-297.

<sup>145</sup> *Rel.Celt.* I; pp.202-207.

<sup>146</sup> LF pp.113-114.

*Dith Fola do chnaimhibh an Cuirp,  
Dith Teinne do'n Armaibh noch  
Dith Cailce do sgiaibh 'n Aidh,  
Dul siar ans na Hiormailtibh.*

The context here is the final combat between Goll and Conn.<sup>147</sup> If *Conn mac an Deirg* is mostly a reworking of the *Dearg*, then the re-modelling of the quatrain may well have to be explained in connection with the genesis of the entire ballad where examples of textual agreement with the *Dearg* occur alongside re-worked material. In this case, it is difficult to class the appearance of the quatrain in *Conn mac an Deirg* as a genuine instance of a floating quatrain, at least in a Scottish environment. It appears that there are no examples of this quatrain in any Irish texts of the *Dearg* or *Conn mac an Deirg*.

The above ballads are all in a *deibhidhe*-based metre which seems to have facilitated the progress of the quatrain from one ballad to another. If, however, a floating quatrain is to be incorporated into a ballad in a different metre, change on a larger scale than just the textual one becomes necessary. In crossing a metrical boundary, a floating quatrain is likely to be transformed into a stock motif. Although there are instances where material in a different metre is found within ballads, I have not yet encountered an example of a floating quatrain in such an environment. It appears that transformation into a stock motif lies behind a quatrain that is present in most Irish versions of *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, whose metre is difficult to determine exactly.<sup>148</sup> Since fewer syllables were at the adapter's disposal, the triplicated imagery is less fully developed, with only the shower of chalk being given any descriptive elaboration, as in this example from RIA F V 5, a late eighteenth century manuscript by the Dublin scribe Henri Mac an tSaoir.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> The seeming analogy between this and the versions of the *Dearg* in Ardchonaill and McLagan 113 may be significant although the exact nature of the relationship between the *Dearg* and *Conn mac an Deirg* still needs more detailed investigation.

<sup>148</sup> See chapter 5, Section b: *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne*, *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*.

<sup>149</sup> See Appendix, Part 1, Irish Texts, section a: Irish Versions of *Innis sin/dúinn a Oisín*.

*Do éirghe trí ceatha  
Os a ccionn sna néalluibh;  
Cioth fola cioth teineadh,  
Is cith cailce dá sgíathaibh.*

There appears to be some textual overlap with Campbell's text above although it is as yet not possible to explain how this came about since no texts of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* seem to be extant in Scotland and the quatrain is not in evidence in Irish versions of the Dearg.

It appears that this imagery existed as a stock motif as well as in the shape of a floating quatrain independently of the *Cath Gabhra* instance. The Mánus-ballad DF LXVI, *Leacht Guill do chráidh mo croidhe* contains a sequence of three quatrains in which the imagery of the three showers appears to have been worked up into a more detailed shape which also includes other heroic motifs. The participants are Goll and Mánus.<sup>150</sup>

DF LXIV qq.31-33

*Comhraicis Iollann ar a' traigh  
& Maghnus lamh ar laimh  
Teid uatha isna nellaibh nimhe  
Morshlaim theineadh thinntighe*

*Ar sathadh na sleadh sibhneach  
A ccneasuibh na ccuradh ccaithnimheach  
Tig do sheamannaibh na sleadh  
Lasair úaine & folradh*

*Cuirdis ceatha fola rúaidhe  
Osna lannoibh sleasúaine  
An uair budh dearg in talamh ghlais  
Tig fearg Iollainn re Maghnus*

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<sup>150</sup> DF II; pp.318-329.

The shower of sparks has been duplicated while the shower of chalk is not present at all. Despite the fact that this ballad's metre is *deibhidhe*-based there does not appear to be a direct textual relationship to DF LXII.

On a smaller scale, occasional floating couplets can be observed. The couplet *Sochtaid fir Eirionn uile / Ag eisteacht re a n-urluidhe* is present as q.69ab of the rare Irish *Cath Gabhra* text *A Oisín cía in feart dona* in the sequence of combat between Osgar and mac Garaidh.<sup>151</sup> This is paralleled by another couplet from the *Dearg*, placed in the fight between Goll and the *Dearg*, here quoted from q.61cd of the DF text: *Tochtaid fir Eirionn uile / Ré clos bheimionn na hiorghaile*.<sup>152</sup>

Differences are evident in the second line of the couplet which, however, involve near-equivalents. It is likely that the divergence is the result of the expected course of textual development although the possibility that we are dealing with an instance of a stock motif that received near-identical treatment in two different ballads cannot be discounted.

Generally, stock motifs are more common than floating quatrains. In some cases, it is possible that subsequent textual development has obscured the exact situation in the sense that some original floating quatrains may have turned into stock motifs. The presence of a variety of metres limits the usefulness of a floating quatrain as an easily transferable item while stock motifs are more adaptable to different metrical conditions. Another reason for the relative scarcity of floating quatrains is the existence of material belonging to the Heroic Code and its in-built flexibility. The presence of a large number of equivalent motifs allows for textual development, whether deliberate or accidental, without endangering the logic of the plot. The relatively small scale of many heroic motifs allows for their use in a basic form as well as their development into more elaborate longer units. Since a floating quatrain uses heroic motifs as well, their general adaptability makes the floating quatrain as susceptible to change as any other section of text and therefore, in a sense, redundant. The comparative rigidity of floating quatrains is not actually required for the maintenance of the text itself. Such rigidity is normally provided in a ballad context by the underlying patterns of plot structure which often consist of a fixed framework on which ballads of the same type are modelled.

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<sup>151</sup> DF II; pp.32-57.

<sup>152</sup> DF II; pp.298-317.



## **Part 2: The *Cath Gabhra* Ballads**

### **Chapter 4: Background - History or Literature?**

The various categories of texts in which the battle of Gabhair<sup>1</sup> occurs presents a set of contradictions and difficulties. Most of our extant sources do not give much detail about the battle; in ballad terms, the battle of Gabhair is primarily the vehicle for an account of the death of the prominent hero Osgar, the son of Oisín, at the hands of the king of Tara, Cairbre Lifeachair. Other sources place their emphasis on the death of Cairbre Lifeachair in the battle of Gabhair, with various individuals named in different texts as his slayers; some agree with the ballads in casting Osgar in that role.

There is no need to explore the question whether the battle of Gabhair was an actual historical event; it is enough to note that some but not all compilers of historical material were content to see it in that light and included it in their work. For the present purpose, the changing perceptions of history and especially historical material are important rather than history itself - given the nature of early historical writings in Ireland this angle allows material from originally non-historical contexts to be considered. Regarding the battle of Gabhair in particular, different strands of tradition concerning this event appear to have existed alongside each other, and to have mingled on occasion.

The distinction made below between historical writings and literature is to some extent artificial since much of the relevant material discussed from a different angle contains historical aspects as well and vice versa. For comparison with the ballad, however, the available material is easily divided into texts in which the historical or pseudo-historical aspect is of greater significance; and into texts with affinities in the context of literature.

#### **Section a: The *Cath Gabhra* Texts and History**

Irish eighteenth and nineteenth century commentators on the ballads about the battle of Gabhair appear to have been convinced of the historicity of the event.

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<sup>1</sup> The genitive *Gabhra* is used as the nominative in a considerable number of sources.

Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin, in his copy of *Mór anocht mo chúmha féin* in RIA F VI 2, dated 1813, confidently assigns the date AD. 285 to the event.<sup>2</sup>

The Co. Meath scribe Eóin Ó Fionnogáin introduces his version of *Innis sin a Oisín* in RIA 23 O 79 (dated 1821-1824) with the following note:<sup>3</sup>

'Gabhra is a River under the Hill of Tara, where Cairbre Liachfer (Monarch of Ireland) & host defeated the Fenii or Irish Miletia [sic manuscript] - the Battle was fought, on each side of the River - and report says - that a mill on s<sup>d</sup> River was turn'd 40 y<sup>IS</sup> by human blood.'

While this note does not dispute the status of the battle as an actual historical event it nevertheless brings in detail that would appear to belong to the context of folktale rather than that of history; 'report says' may well be interpreted as going back to a contemporary oral source. I have no other reference to this particular gruesome result of the battle.

Moving on to the perspective of historical writing, Nicholas O'Kearney gives the date of the battle as the 17th of June, A.D. 283, referring to the authority of Charles O'Connor,<sup>4</sup> and rejects the alternative date of A.D. 296 proposed by O'Flaherty. O'Kearney also mentions the location of the battle as Garristown in Co. Dublin but offers his own interpretation as *Baile Gharraidh* as his preferred choice.

## Keating

Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn* contains two brief references to events at the battle of Gabhair. The first of these describes Cormac's mother's vision and states blandly that Cairbre Lithfeachair fell by the *Fian* at the battle of Gabhair.<sup>5</sup> The second reference gives more detail:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> P.122.

<sup>3</sup> P.307.

<sup>4</sup> N. O'Kearney: *The Battle of Gabhra*; p.60.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. P.S. Dinneen (ed. & tr.): *The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating D.D.*, vol.II; London (ITS) 1908; pp.300-301 (Book I, Section XLIII).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.254 (Book I, Section XLVII). The passage is translated on p.255: '(...) And Cairbre was slain at the Battle of Gabhra by Simeon son of Cearb, one of the Fortuatha of Leinster; and the reason why the battle of Gabhra was fought was: Samhaoir daughter of Fionn son of Cumhall was the wife of Cormac Cas son of Oilill Olom, and she was the mother of Tinne and Connla and Mogh Corb; and it was by reason of that relationship that Mogh Corb protected his mother's brother, that is Oisín son of Fionn, and the clanna Baoiscne from being overpowered by Cairbre Lithfeachair and Aodh Caomh son of Garaidh Glundubh of the race of Morna; and at that time the clanna Morna formed the regular army of Ireland; and they were at enmity with Fionn and with the clanna Baoiscne for seven years. Hence the party of Garaidh Glundubh incited Cairbre Lithfeachair and the

(...) agus is lé Simeon mac Cirb d'Fhorthuathaibh Laighean do marbhadh Cairbre i gCath Gabhra. Agus is é adhbhar fár cuireadh Cath Gabhra, Samhaoir inghean Fhinn mic Cumhaill fá bean do Chormac Cas mac Oiliolla Óluim, agus fá hí máthair Thinne agus Chonla agus mhogha Corb í, agus is tré an ngaol soin do chonghaibh Mogh Corb bráthair a Mháthar .i. Oisín mac Finn agus Clanna Baoiscne tar sárughadh Chairbre Lithfeachair agus Aodha Caoimh mic Garaidh Ghlúnduibh do chlannaibh Mórna, agus is ag clannaibh Mórna do bhí buannacht Éireann an tráth soin. Agus do bhádar feadh seacht mbliadhan i n-easaonta ré Fionn agus ré Clannaibh Baoiscne; gonadh uime sin do ghríosadar clanna Garuidh Ghlúnduibh Cairbre Lithfeachair agus cúigeadhaigh Éireann mar aon ris d' aithríoghadh Mhogha Corb, i ndóigh go tiocfadh de sin clanna Baoiscne d' ionnarbadh, gonadh de so táinig tabhairt Chatha Ghabhra.

There is no mention of Osgar but the enmity between the descendants of Baoisgne and of Morna as well as their involvement in the battle are emphasised. Keating's date is the year AD. 281.<sup>7</sup> There is a marked difference in the story as told by Keating and the versions of events as told in the ballad texts although Keating's version agrees reasonably well with the Annals of Ulster below. Keating was familiar with at least one of the *Cath Gabhra* texts since he quotes two quatrains from *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* in *Trí Bior-Ghaoithe an Bháis*.<sup>8</sup>

#### Four Masters

The Annals of the Four Masters give the date A.D.284 for the battle and state the following about the event:<sup>9</sup>

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provincial kings of Ireland to dethrone Mogh Corb in the hope that, as a consequence of this the clanna Baoiscne would be banished. And this led to the battle of Gabhra.'

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. vol. IV, pp.132-133.

<sup>8</sup> G. Keating (ed. O. Bergin): *Trí Bior-Ghaoithe an Bháis*; Dublin/London 1931; p.175.

<sup>9</sup> J. O'Donovan (ed.): *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland* vol.I; Dublin 1851; p.120. The following translation is on p.121: 'The age of Christ, 284. After Cairbre Liffeachair had been seventeen years in the sovereignty of Ireland, he fell in the battle of Gabhra-Aichle, by the hand of Semeon, son of Cearb, [one] of the Fotharta; Fearcearb, the son of Cormac Cas, having brought the Fiana with him against the king, to defend Leath-Mhogha from him.' A footnote by O'Donovan (note c on pp.120-121) follows the account given by O'Flaherty for which see this section, sub-section: O'Flaherty.

*Aois Criost, da céd ochtmoghat a cethair. Iar mbeith seacht mbliadhna décc hi ríge n Ereann do Cairbre Liffeachair do ces i ccath Gabhra Aichle, do laimh Sémeoin, mic Cirb, do Fothortaibh, iar tabhairt na fene dFiorcorb, mac Cormaic Cais, lais iad aghaidh an rígh do cosnamh Leithe Mogha fris.*

Donald Meek suggests that this entry was an addition made by the compilers;<sup>10</sup> it bears a striking resemblance to the corresponding entries in the annals below but makes no mention of Osgar.

### **Annals of Tigernach**

The Annals of Tigernach give the following entry:<sup>11</sup>

*Coirpre Lifeochair cecidit a cath Gabra Aithle la Seniach mac Fir chirb do Fothartaib .iiiiim.ccl.uiii.*

This is largely in keeping with the Annals of Ulster below but does not mention any background to the battle or Osgar's involvement. The laconic note *Cath Gabhra etir Laignib fein* under the year 644 does not shed any light on the present problem;<sup>12</sup> apparently there were traditions regarding two battles at the same place - or at least places with very similar names - available to the annalist.

### **Annals of Ulster**

The Annals of Ulster provide an interesting insight into the problems historians had to contend with regarding their material. The entry for the year 4264 since Creation runs:<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Meek: *HC*; discussion of BDL XXII, section ii.

<sup>11</sup> Wh. Stokes: 'The Annals of Tigernach. Second Fragment' in: *Revue Celtique* XVII (1896); p.23. Translated as: 'Carbre Lifeachair fell in the battle of Gabra Aithle (leg. Aichle?) by Seníach son of Fer Cirb of the Fothairt, A.M. 4259.'

<sup>12</sup> Id.: 'The Annals of Tigernach, Third Fragment.' in: *Revue Celtique* XVII (1896); p.187.

<sup>13</sup> S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (edd.): *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*; Dublin (DIAS) 1983; pp.22. This is translated as follows on p.23: 'Cairpre Lifeachair son of Cormac Ulfhota was killed by Oscar son of Oisín son of Finn in the battle of Gabra, and Oscar was killed by Cairpre Lifeachair at the same time. Or Cairpre Lifeachair fell beside Gabra Aichol by Senioth son of Cirp of the Fothairt. It is Fer Corb son of Mug Corb son of Cormac Cass who gathered the Fianna of Ireland against Cairpre to dispute Leth Moga with him. For Fer Corb and the two provinces of Mumu were giving battle to the king of Ireland, and it is a man of the Fothairt that killed Cairpre and not the warrior of the Fianna, that is Oscar son of Oisín as the story-tellers tell, and thereof the following was said:

(...) *Coirpri Lifechair mc. Cormaic Ulfhata occissus est o Oscar mc. Oisín mhc. Finn hi cath Gabra, 7 Oscar occissus est o Cairpri Lifechair in eadem hora. Uel Coirpri Lifechari cecidit for toib Gabra Aichle la Senioth mc. Cirp do Fhotharthaibh. Is he tra Fer Corp mc. Mogha Cuirm mc. Cormaic Caiss do thinoil fianna Herenn i n-aghid Coirpri do chosnamh Leithi Mogha ris. Ar ro-boi Fer Corp 7 da coiced Muman ic tabairt in catha da righ Herind 7 is he in fer do Fhothartaibh ro marbh Coirpre 7 ni he in feinig, .i. Oscar mc. Oissín, conid de sin ro raidhedh so sis:*

*Senioth sil Fothairt na n-ech  
mac Cirp ciarbo chomaithech*

...

*Na Fothaig regnauerunt anno.*

The phrase *amail indisit na scelaighidha* implies that there was a strand of tradition, presumably oral, regarding the battle of Gabhair which agrees well with the ballad texts but which at the same time was rejected by the annalist in favour of a version which was obviously perceived as historically accurate.

It appears that this distinction between 'historically accurate' and 'historically inaccurate' (or at least of doubtful authenticity) that is evident in the Annals of Ulster also underlies Keating's account, albeit with a lesser degree of differentiation. Keating's own view of material relating to Fionn mac Cumhaill in general states that alongside 'historically accurate' accounts there also existed *iomad d'fhinnscéalaibh filidheachta* ('many imaginative romances' in Dinneen's translation), thus implying a need for differentiation between the two kinds of material.<sup>14</sup> However, from the outright denial of Osgar's involvement found in the Annals of Ulster we have arrived with Keating's account at a situation where considerable emphasis is given to the antagonism between the descendants of Baoisgne and of Morna; this suggests that the perception of what constituted 'historically accurate' material in Keating's time had shifted considerably towards the inclusion of material that originally belonged to the storyteller's domain.

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Senioth of the seed of the Fothairt of the seeds,  
the son of Corb though he was a foreigner (?),

...

The Fothaid ruled for one year.'

<sup>14</sup> Dinneen, op.cit. vol.II, pp.326-327. Keating gives the examples of *Cath Fionntrágha*, *Bruighean Chaorthainn* and *Imtheacht an Ghiolla Dheacair*. The first of these is significant for the *Cath Gabhra* texts in the context of literature. See this chapter, section b, sub-section: The role of *Cath Fionntrágha*.



## O' Flaherty

Roderic O'Flaherty's late seventeenth century account of the battle illustrates this development even better:<sup>15</sup>

'King Carbry reinforced by the arms of Aid, king of Connaught, came to an engagement with the Baoisgneans and the Fotharts at Gabhra Acoill<sup>16</sup> near Temor; the latter were assisted by Mogcorb the grandson of Oilill Olom by his own son Cormac, who was proclaimed king of Munster after Fiach. But to give a more particular detail of the grounds of this dispute, after the death of Finn in the year 284, his family O'Baoisgne with the life guards revolted from king Carbry, and Aid king of Connaught, whom king Carbry had substituted in the place of the refugees, carried on hostilities against them for seven years; when they solicited the aid of Mogcorb king of Munster their relationship, as he was the grandson of Finn by his daughter Samaria, by whom Cormac had Tinn, Conla, and this Mogcorb the progenitor of the Dalcassians, and with combined forces they marched towards Temor, and came to a decisive battle with king Carbry at Gabhra. In the heat of the battle, Carbry and Oscar the grandson of Finn, by Ossin, came to single combat. The king all covered with wounds slew his antagonist, but he was killed dealing death around him with undaunted bravery by Simeon the son of Kirb, of the race of the Fotharts.'

O'Flaherty was familiar with Keating's work<sup>17</sup> and in the extended title of his work on the title page he mentions the comparison of 'very Ancient Documents.' O'Flaherty considered the battle of Gabhair as a real historical event in which historical figures took part. The passage quoted is rather similar to Keating's with the exception of the following points: the descendants of Morna and their involvement in the event are not mentioned and Osgar's fight with Cairbre is singled out for particular emphasis, but while Cairbre kills Osgar he himself is killed by Simeon son of Kirb. Thus it is apparent that O'Flaherty had sources available to him that

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<sup>15</sup> R. O'Flaherty (tr. J. Hely): *Ogygia, or, a Chronological Account of Irish Events*, vol.1; Dublin 1793; p.246. O'Flaherty (vol.I, p.XXII) gives the date 1684 in the dedication for his book, written originally in Latin.

<sup>16</sup> Author's footnote: 'The Battle of Gaura was fought near Temor in Bregia, and not near Temor Luachia, in the county of Limerick.' Another footnote on the same page gives the year A.D.296 for the battle.

<sup>17</sup> Op.cit. p.247.



presented a picture different from Keating's - hence the mention of Osgar's death by Cairbre - and that he preferred the slightly different bias of these sources towards the 'storytellers' material' which the Annals of Ulster denounced as incorrect.

### ***Dindshenchas***

*Dindshenchas* lore only mentions the battle of Gabhair in passing:<sup>18</sup>

*Glaissi Bulga, cidh díatá? Ní ansa. Glas ingen Deirg meic Deaghadh roalt Osgur mac Oisín meic Find. Co romarb Cairpre mac Cormaic uí Chuinn intí Osgur a cath Gabhra. Et tánic Glas aníar al-Luachair Deaghadh do chinedh a dalta co tech a hathar. (...)*

This entry concentrates on the fate of Osgar's fostermother after Osgar's death; yet another strand of tradition that would appear to be linked to oral tradition rather than history. While much of the *dindshenchas*-material is connected to historical events, there is also a significant amount of material drawn from the context of traditional lore in the widest sense. The above entry on the place-name *Glaisse Bulga* would seem to be drawn from the latter context.

### **Book of Leinster**

A poem in the Book of Leinster, attributed to Oisín and thus perhaps not intended to be primarily historical, prefaces the verse with *I cath Gabra ro marbad Osgur 7 Cairpre Lipheachair*. This early source, dating to the second half of the 12th century,<sup>19</sup> again would appear to represent oral tradition. The relevant quatrains of the poem run:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> E. Gwynn: *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, vol.4 (RIA Todd Lecture Series vol. XI); Dublin/London 1924; pp.288. The following translation is found on p.289: '*Glaisse Bulga*, whence the name? Not hard to say. Glass, daughter of Derg mac Dedad, reared Oscar, son of Oisín, son of Fionn. Cairpre son of Cormac ua Cuinn slew Oscar in the battle of Gabair: and Glass came from *Luachair Dedad* in the west to keen over her nursling at his father's house (...).'

<sup>19</sup> R.I. Best, O. Bergin, M.A. O'Brien (eds.): *The Book of Leinster* vol.I, Dublin (DIAS) 1954; pp.XV-XVII.

<sup>20</sup> R.I. Best, M.A. O'Brien (eds.): *The Book of Leinster* vol.III; Dublin (DIAS) 1957; p.663. Curry's translation is quoted by O'Kearney in *TOS I*, pp.49-50:

'Cairpre threw a sudden cast,  
From the back of his horse good in battle;  
Shortly before he met his own death,  
Osgur was slain by his right arm.'

2 *Tarlaic Cairpre aurchur n-airc*  
*do muin a mairc maith is tres*  
*gair sin condristais a sciss*  
*Oscur ro bí a lam dess*

3 *Tarlaic Oscur irchur n-oll*  
*co fergach lond immar leo*  
*coro marb Corpre hua Cuind*  
*riasra giallsatar gluind gleó*

The originally oral context is further confirmed in the fifth quatrain where Oisín is made to refer to his own presence at the battle of Gabhair in a first-person account.

### *Acallam na Senórach*

One more source with a historical connection remains to be investigated: the *Acallam na Senórach*, extant in an older and a younger version. Both present us with a specialised 'historical' situation in the sense that Caoilte and Oisín relate the history of the *Fian* to St. Patrick; thus we might reasonably expect the battle of Gabhair to be dealt with in some detail. Indeed, the battle of Gabhair is mentioned at the beginning of the older *Acallam*, along with the battle of Commar and the battle of Ollarbha, and along with an implicit reference to the destruction of the *Fian* as a result of these battles.<sup>21</sup> The prominent position given to these events appears to indicate that they were likely to be identified by the reader as both crucial and well-known events. At any rate, if these were obscure battles the reader would require an account of them and their respective backgrounds and neither is given in the *Acallamh*. The battle of Commar does not appear to be mentioned again at all; the battle of Ollarbha, however, is featured again later in two different instances<sup>22</sup> but apart from the disastrous outcome and a list of the slain there is only scant information. The situation is similar for the battle of Gabhair. In answer to Patrick's

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Oscur threw a mighty throw,  
 Angrily, vehemently, like a lion;  
 And killed Cairpre the grandson of Conn,  
 Before they raised their battle cries.'

<sup>21</sup> Wh. Stokes and E. Windisch (eds.): *Irische Texte* (4te Serie, 1. Heft); Leipzig 1900; p.1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. pp.31-32 and p.162.

question what destroyed the *Fian* Caoilte singles out the battles of Gabhair and Ollarbha<sup>23</sup> but does not give any detail regarding the battle of Gabhair. A conversation between the king of Ireland, Caoilte, and Oisín about the battle occurs near the end of the *Acallamh*:<sup>24</sup>

*Is annsin do fhiarfuig rí Eirenn dibsum: 'Cia ro marb Cairpre Lifeachair mac Cormaic i cath Gabra?' 'Oscur mac Oissin,' ar Cailte, 'ro marb hé.' 'A fhirinde as maith do denam,' ar Oissin. 'Cia chena ro marb hé?' ar in rí. 'Orlám rí Fotharta andes,' ar Oissin, '.i. óclach gráda ro bóí acumsa 7 'gom athair reomum.' Oissin adubairt:*

*Orlam mac rig Fotharta. nochar b é in fer co maithfech,  
brathair Brónaig, ní brég libh - ro marb Cairpre Lifechair.*

*'Ocus Osccur dono, cia rus-marb?' ar rí Eirenn. 'Aenurchur Cairpri Lifechair meic Cormaic ro marb hé.'*

Even in a context where we might reasonably expect a definitive and accurate account of who killed Cairpre Lifeachair two different versions are presented as given by characters who, even if they were not present at the event,<sup>25</sup> were in a position to know exactly what happened. Oisín's rebuke ('It is best to tell its truth.') provides a key to this problem. Oisín's statement seems to imply that Caoilte knew the truth but said that Osgar killed Cairpre in order to enhance Osgar's standing as a hero in the opinion of his audience. The king of Ireland appears to have been already aware of Osgar's prominent position within the *Fian* since he asks for the manner of his death.

It is likely that several traditions about the battle of Gabhair were known in the learned environment in which the older *Acallam* was compiled and that this passage represents another example of conscious rejection of an account that was perceived as inaccurate in favour of an historically accurate one. It may be significant

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.31.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.222, ll.7940-7949. My translation runs: 'And then the king of Ireland asked them: 'Who killed Cairpre Lifeachair the son of Cormac in the battle of Gabhair?' 'Oscur the son of Oissin,' said Cailte, 'killed him.' 'It is best to tell its truth,' said Oissin. 'Who, besides, killed him?' said the king. 'Orlám the king of the Fotharta in the south,' said Oissin, 'that is, a trusted warrior I had and my father before me.' Oissin said:

*'Orlám the son of the king of the Fotharta,  
He was not a vainglorious man,  
Brónach's brother, do not think it a lie,  
He killed Cairpre Lifeachair.'*

'And Oscur, then, who killed him?' said the king of Ireland. 'A single shot from Cairpre Lifeachair the son of Cormac killed him.'

<sup>25</sup> Most of the ballads about the battle of Gabhra make both of them participants and eyewitnesses.

that Orlám, firmly placed in a *Fian*-context by Oisín, replaces Senioth/Semioth/Simeon son of Cirb whom we have encountered in the annals, Keating, and O' Flaherty.

The younger *Agallamh* does not present a more detailed picture than the older *Acallamh*, rather the opposite. The disastrous battles of Gabhair and Ollarbha are mentioned briefly but no new information emerges.<sup>26</sup> The death of Mac Lughdach in the battle of Gabhair is mentioned in a poem although no details are given.<sup>27</sup> A quatrain in a poem on the battle of Cnucha is slightly more satisfactory:<sup>28</sup>

*Cairbre Lifeachair nír lacc  
gor ghabh risan bhFéin formad,  
Go ttorchair i ccath CCabhra glan  
Do láimh oirlaimh áitheasaigh.*

Here it is implied that the blame for causing the battle lies with Cairbre, by reason of his jealousy towards the *Fian*. If *oirlaimh* in the final line is the personal name Orlámh we have a parallel to the older *Acallamh* where Cairbre's slayer is named Orlámh. However, this is contradicted by a quatrain in a poem listing battles and slain heroes:<sup>29</sup>

*Marbh Osccar an ghaisgidh ghort  
do láimh Chairbre mheic Corbmaic;  
marbh Cairbre a tTulaigh na Ríogh  
do láimh Osccair gan iomshníomh.*

This quatrain presents the view of the ballads regarding the deaths of Osgar and Cairbre. As with the older *Acallamh*, one of the most momentous events in the history of the *Fian* is more or less glossed over; similarly, there appear to be several strands of tradition, some of them contradictory, which meet in the younger *Agallamh*.

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<sup>26</sup> N. Ní Sheaghda (ed.): *Agallamh na Seanórach* vol.I; Dublin 1942; pp.88-89.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.185.

<sup>28</sup> Op.cit. vol.III, p.177.

<sup>29</sup> Op.cit. vol.I, p.153.

## Prose tale

For a non-historical example, O'Kearney<sup>30</sup> quotes a prose account of the battle of Gabhair in which historical-sounding names are introduced alongside characters known from the *Cath Gabhra* ballads. This appears to be a storyteller's account since it diverges from the historical sources in several significant respects; O'Kearney himself considers this piece as unhistorical but includes it because of its antiquity, dating it to the fifteenth or early sixteenth century.<sup>31</sup> The age of the tale is therefore relative to O'Kearney's own sources and compared to the Book of Leinster poem, the annals, and the *Acallam*, for instance, it seems to be a relatively late text. It appears to draw on ballad sources as well as the Romantic tales for its material and style of language; the historical aspect seems to play a decidedly minor role.

Cairbre appears here as the son of Art (not of Cormac) and he has a daughter called Sgeimhsholas - in the manner of the romantic tales - who becomes the innocent reason for the conflict when Fionn demands payment of tribute or the *ius primae noctis* before her marriage to a certain Maolsheachlainn Ó Faolain, son of the king of the Decies. Cairbre then summons the kings of Ulster, Leinster, and Munster among others to help him to throw off the yoke of Fionn and the *Fian*, who are pictured in a position of power over the rest of Ireland. Fionn and the *Fian* are said to be in league with the 'Lochlonnachs' - a most unlikely alliance in ballad terms. Fionn's assembled force contains a number of other unexpected participants. Diarmaid Ó Duibhne appears, despite the fact that the account of his death, whether in prose or ballad form, logically pre-dates the battle of Gabhair. Goll mac Morna, of whose death is told in a ballad which likewise pre-dates the battle, is named alongside a number of other descendants of Morna; one of them is called Modhcorb - perhaps a confused echo of a source similar to Keating's. All other accounts which mention the descendants of Morna at all place them among Fionn's antagonists in the battle. Great deeds of valour are performed on both sides and are described in considerable detail. Fionn himself is stated to have been present at the battle; most other prose accounts agree that he was dead by that time while the ballads state that he is absent at the battle but returns in time to witness Osgar's death. Cairbre kills Osgar with a spear cast in the tale but no mention is made at all of Cairbre's death.

One of the sources of this incongruous text appears to have been one or probably more of the ballads about the battle of Gabhair, primarily a version of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*. There is a substantial amount of evidence for this

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<sup>30</sup> Op.cit. pp.233-253.

<sup>31</sup> TOS I, pp.233-234 in footnote 1. No source is given.

suggestion. The tale uses the phrase *cath Gabhra na m-béimionn (g-cruadh)*;<sup>32</sup> this recurs in the ballads - usually without the adjective - with such regularity that it can be termed a stock phrase. The death of Faolan son of Fionn is described at length in the tale;<sup>33</sup> Faolan appears in the list of fallen heroes in versions of *Innis duinn, a Oisín*.

The final section of the tale shows the greatest similarity to *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.<sup>34</sup> Caoilte's sorrow at the death of his six sons is mentioned. There is a description of Osgar's fatal wounds and his exclamation that he is going to die of his wounds. Much is made of the account of Fionn's sorrow for Osgar's death and the tradition that Fionn never wept for anyone but Osgar. The general mourning of the surviving *Fian*-warriors concludes the tale.

On the whole, it is evident that the composer of this tale took much of his material from a Fionn-context, in particular ballad sources. Romantic tales appear to have exerted some influence, and possibly historical sources as well although historical accuracy seems to have been a very minor concern of the composer's. The non-historical source material appears to have been treated with considerable freedom, too, but the tale does reveal the breadth of material available to the storytellers.

It is obvious from the above summary of sources with different historical affinities that, while the battle of Gabhair was perceived as an actual historical event, the role of Osgar or indeed of the *Fian* in the battle belonged originally to a storytelling or similar predominantly non-historical context but began to infiltrate the historically oriented account of the battle of Gabhair at a fairly early stage since it is already present in the annals and the *Acallamh*.

## **Section b: The *Cath Gabhra* Texts and Their Literary Affinities**

As the *Cath Gabhra* ballads can be observed to be the product of a predominantly non-historical context, it becomes more likely that potential models for at least some of the texts may be found in the field of literature. Although some links appear to exist, the texts beginning *A Oisín cia in feart dona* (DF XXXIX) and *Innis dúinn a Oisín* are not our main concern here; firstly because the two texts

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. pp.138-139.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pp.142-143.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. pp.150-153.



appear to be connected and secondly because the bulk of their source material is very probably drawn from other non-ballad *Cath Gabhra* texts or from other ballads.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the changes that have led to the development of the 'Scottish Variant' have to be considered from a different angle as well. This leaves mainly the texts that are first attested in *BDL*, *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*.<sup>36</sup>

### The role of Cath Finntrágha

The first literary item which provided the original composers of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* with inspiration for their ballads belongs to the Fionn-context as well: *Cath Finntrágha* (CF), 'The Battle of Ventry.' The earliest extant account of this battle is found in the *Acallam na Senórach*; however, this tells mainly of the deaths of the warrior Cael and his wife Créde: on the final day of the battle Cael was drowned and his wife died of grief as a consequence. The background to the battle and its actual course are largely ignored except for the fact that the enemy consisted of a force of invaders.<sup>37</sup> By the Early Modern period CF had developed into an event of much greater importance and considerable popularity since 38 manuscript copies of the tale survive, falling into three distinct groups of versions.<sup>38</sup> Apart from the *Acallam*-tale, CF appears to draw on sources such as the invasion tales of the *Lebor Gabála* and the 'Second Battle of Mag Tuired' with its motif of protecting army (in this case the Tuatha Dé Danann led by Lugh) defending Ireland against invaders (here: the Fomoiré); an Ulster Cycle link is also apparent.<sup>39</sup> The episode concerning Cael and his wife, here named Geilgheis, concludes this account of CF but preceding this the tale describes at some length how Fionn and his *Fian*, the Tuatha Dé Danann and the fighting forces of Ireland defend themselves against the invading army of Daire Donn, king of the world, and his numerous allies. The catastrophic nature of the battle is already alluded to in the extended title *Cath Finntrágha ann so síos .i. oighe Finn [7] fianaibh Éirionn 7 bás Dáiri Duin[n] rígh an domhain móir*;<sup>40</sup> indeed, the slaughter on both sides is described as fairly comprehensive. Fionn's own death in the battle is slightly

<sup>35</sup> This is discussed in the appropriate context in chapter 5, sections a and b.

<sup>36</sup> The following relies heavily on the findings of D.E.Meek in *HC*, discussion of *BDL* XXII, sub-section (2) 'The literary and historical significance of the battle of Gabhair.'

<sup>37</sup> Stokes and Windisch: op. cit.; pp.21-25.

<sup>38</sup> C. O'Rahilly (ed.): *Cath Finntrágha*; Dublin (DIAS, MMIS XX) 1962; pp.XXV-XXIX.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. pp.XIV-XVIII. Meek (*HC*, discussion of *BDL* VI, section (1) 'The relationship between the prose and verse accounts of Cath Finntrágha (CF)') casts doubt on a suggested link with accounts of the Battle of Clontarf.

<sup>40</sup> O'Rahilly, p.1.

problematic as other accounts of his death exist. One such account is alluded to in DF XLIII, q.40, where Fionn is said to have died in Broic but no details are given. *Dindshenchas* refers to Brug na Bóinne, more precisely Ferta na Failenn, as the place where Fionn dies by the spear of Luagne in the entry on Brug I.<sup>41</sup> Other sources from the tenth century onwards state that Fionn was killed in battle at Áth Brea on the Boyne by Aiclech mac Dubdrema who then cut off Fionn's head. Before the battle, Fionn had broken a *geis* by drinking out of a horn.<sup>42</sup> Yet another tradition asserts that Fionn met his end at a place called Léim Finn on the Boyne. When his warriors begin to leave him in his old age, he determined to test his strength by leaping across the Boyne. On his way there he breaks a *geis* and in consequence is killed when he falls between two rocks. His body is found by four fishermen and one of them, Aiclech mac Duibhreann, cuts off Fionn's head and is himself killed by the others.<sup>43</sup> While we should not take the CF version of Fionn's death too seriously the tale is nevertheless significant because of its popularity and influence on other texts in the Fionn-context.<sup>44</sup> Of these, a ballad on the theme of CF needs to be mentioned; only one version appears to be extant (BDL VI). Set in a Patrick-Oisean framework, this is mostly derived from one of the prose accounts of CF although the ballad explicitly states that two battalions of the *Fian* survive the battle Oisean even tells Patrick that the end of the *Fian* only came in the battle of Gabhair. It is clear that the composer of the CF ballad was familiar with *Cath Gabhra* traditions and their importance and regarded them as of greater significance than the CF account.<sup>45</sup> The other two texts which are relevant in this context are *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*.

The dialogue structure of *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*, involving Fionn and Fearghus File, is closely paralleled by several passages in CF where Fearghus reports back to Fionn in order to inform him of the progress of the battle; e.g. CF ll.500-

<sup>41</sup> E. Gwynn (ed.): *The Metrical Dindshenchas* vol.2; (RIA Todd Lecture Series vol.IX); Dublin 1906; p.12.

<sup>42</sup> K. Meyer: 'The Death of Fionn Mac Cumail' in: *ZCP* I; p.462. See also S.H. O'Grady (ed.): *Silva Gadelica* vol.II; London/Edinburgh 1892; pp.98-99.

<sup>43</sup> As reconstructed by Meyer, op. cit.; pp.463-465.

<sup>44</sup> The remark *acht gé dho éirig arís* following the account of Fionn's death (l.1338) appears to indicate that some scribe or redactor felt uneasy about this event and attempted to mend matters in this less than convincing way. See also Meek: *HC*, discussion of BDL XXII, section (a) 'The relationship between the BDL poems and "Cath Fionntrágha" (CF),' sub-section (vi) 'The roles of the principal characters.' O'Rahilly (op.cit. pp.84-85, note to l.1338) interprets *marb*, in the phrase *7 ba marb hé asa aithli*, as meaning 'unconscious,' thereby avoiding the problem of Fionn's death altogether. However, her interpretation does not offer an explanation for the now redundant *acht gé dho éirig arís*.

<sup>45</sup> Meek: *HC*; discussion of BDL VI, section (1) 'The relationship between prose and verse accounts of Cath Fionntrágha (CF).'

514, 834-840, 1096-1100, 1113-1117, 1125-1138, 1167-1203, 1218-1235, and 1357-1367. All other CG ballads have Oisín in the role of narrator, not Fearghus. His role in *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* may well result from borrowing from CF; and while *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* is very likely to have been composed with Fearghus as the narrator the convention which casts Oisín in that role breaks through at the very end where Fearghus identifies himself in terms that are strongly reminiscent of Oisín's usual sentiments at the close of a ballad: *Truagh air éis na Féine/ Mo sgéal[a] ré innis* (q.14cd). Fearghus also fulfils another function in CF by encouraging the warriors in the battle; e.g. CF ll.502-506, 756-760, 808-813, 876-893, 910-914, 1084-1098, 1118-1125, and 1206-1217. This may be seen to fit in with the themes of two ancillary texts, *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* and *Osgar iolbhuadhach*, which are traditionally regarded as incitements uttered by Fearghus to Osgar immediately prior to the battle of Gabhair. The alliterating epithet *ilbhuadhach* is used by Fearghus of Osgar in CF l.1126, but also of Oisín in l.1196, so that the possibility of a direct link between CF and this particular praise poem at least should not be rejected out of hand.

The prominence of Osgar in the *Cath Gabhra* texts, particularly in *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*, is paralleled by his importance in CF which describes his deeds in two passages (ll.408-456 and 1125-1166); in ll.1125-1131 Fearghus reports to Fionn on Osgar's prowess. Of particular interest here is the run describing Osgar's attack on the invaders in ll.408-415 which uses the stylistic device of comparison involving imagery which describes the power of waves and currents of water. In *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* this is paralleled by the same stylistic device in qq.8-10; here, the imagery is more varied but still drawing on nature and water imagery is present in three instances: *Ní luaith[e] eas <abhann>* (q.8a), *Ná ríoghbhuinte srotha* (q.8c), and *Mar tharbh thuinne <treathui[n]>* (q.10d). Another run describing Osgar appears in CF ll.1153-1166 but this is rather further removed from the relevant passage in *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*. Osgar's attack on the king of France in CF ll.435-445 does not offer the same kind of analogous style and imagery but is somewhat reminiscent of Osgar's attack on Cairbre in *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*, qq.10 and 12.

Another episode in CF has a near-correspondence in *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*. This is the killing in a single blow of Finnachta Fiaclach, son of the king of the world, by Goll Garbh, son of the king of Scotland (CF ll.1293-1306). In *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* (q.13) Osgar kills Art mac Cairbre with a single stroke and

despite the different protagonists<sup>46</sup> there is a conspicuous link in the phrase *mionn ríogh* (q.13d) to which item two lines are devoted in the ballad; CF likewise puts it in a position of considerable prominence (ll.1293-1296). The fact that both Finnachta Fiaclach and Art mac Cairbre are killed after their respective fathers provides a further possible connection.<sup>47</sup>

The links between CF and *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* are less conspicuous. Both texts contain an episode involving both Osgar and Caoilte mac Ronáin; in *Mór anocht...* this is set in the aftermath of the battle of Gabhair and consists of Caoilte's arrival, a dialogue between him and the dying Osgar, Caoilte's examining of Osgar's wounds and his subsequent fainting, and a final parting remark by Caoilte to Osgar (qq.29-33). While the dialogue element is present in the CF episode (ll.1131-1152) the remainder of this is rather different: Caoilte is dispatched by Fionn and Fearghus to help Osgar who is hard pressed by the invaders. On Caoilte's arrival Osgar looks up at him and comments disapprovingly on Caoilte's cowardice earlier in the battle, thus inciting Caoilte to greater bravery.

The relationship between the *Fian* and the Tara dynasty furnishes another point of potential contact between the two texts. In *Mór anocht...* (q.6) the oppressive taxes the *Fian* exacted from Ireland as well as their excessive pride are given among the causes of Cairbre's resentment which led to the battle of Gabhair; in CF, Cormac gives a detailed list of the different kinds of tribute Fionn demanded of Ireland (ll.744-755) and refuses to join the defending force. Thus, the role of Cormac agrees well with the state of affairs generally described in the ballads, that there was at least latent hostility between the *Fian* and the king of Ireland. His son Cairbre, however, appears on different sides in the *Cath Gabhra* ballads and CF; all *Cath Gabhra* texts agree that Cairbre was the initiator of the battle and portray him in a less than flattering light, while in CF he joins the *Fian* and is even welcomed by them before he takes part in the battle (ll.756-802). The unusual portrayal of Cairbre in CF may well be founded in a desire of the author to emphasise the need to unite forces in order to confront a common enemy. The theme of defending Ireland against invaders is present in an episode in *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*, qq.13-16, albeit in a rather theoretical fashion. Patrick asks Oisean how the survivors of the battle of Gabhair

<sup>46</sup> The introduction of another hero besides Osgar in *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* would detract from the ballad's aim of extolling Osgar's deeds.

<sup>47</sup> The plot of the ballad is slightly flawed here but this might be taken as evidence supporting the suggestion that this episode was modelled directly on CF. If Osgar's first blow beheaded Cairbre and if his second one, following immediately afterwards as qq.12 and 13 imply, when did Art have the opportunity to retrieve the royal diadem from his dead father and place it on his own head before being killed by Osgar?



would have met an invader-threat and Oisean is forced to admit that they would not have been able to do so and that they even had to send for Fathadh Canann to lead the *Fian* and take the kingship of Ireland. This passage illustrates the extent of the casualties of the battle of Gabhair in contrast with CF where practically everybody is killed in the battle. Fothadh or Fathadh Canann, incidentally, was known as the leader of a *fian*-band at least as early as the tenth century and he is occasionally mentioned in loose association with Fionn's *fian*-band.<sup>48</sup> His apparent connection with Scotland in may be a reflection of his father's exile in Scotland after the battle of Cenn Abrat.<sup>49</sup>

One particular invader-figure of note is the king of Lochlann who appears as an ally of the king of the world in CF, along with his three sons (ll.896-1040). CF here represents the usual situation which also appears as the norm in a number of ballads, e.g. *Mánus* and *Teanntachd Mhór na Féinne*. However, in *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*, q.5, the son of the king of Lochlann is one of the prominent heroes killed on the side of the *Fian* and this, at least in ballad terms, is an unusual situation.

### **The role of the *Cath Maige Mucrama* tales**

*Mór anocht mo chumha féin* and, to a lesser extent, *Innis dúinn a Osgair* appear to have been influenced by some tales from the *Cath Maige Mucrama* (CMM) complex of stories. This includes the tales *Cath Maige Mucrama*, *Scéla Éogain 7 Cormaic*, *Scéla Moshauluim 7 Maic Con 7 Luigdech* and *Cath Cinn Abrat* of which *Scéla Éogain* is not significant in the present context.<sup>50</sup> Originally probably of Munster origin and affiliations, the CMM tales have become attached to material relating to the Tara dynasty, in particular to the figures of Art mac Cuinn and Cormac mac Airt; Fionn makes a brief appearance in *Scéla Moshauluim* in connection with Mac Con, one of the protagonists of the CMM tales. The CMM texts can be dated to the ninth century although sources dating to c. 700 are likely to underlie CMM, *Scéla Éogain* and *Scéla Moshauluim*. A late Middle Irish or Early Modern Irish version of CMM exists which became very popular; this bears the stylistic hallmarks of many romanticised tales of that period.<sup>51</sup>

Taken together, the CMM tales give an account of the enmity between Lugaid Mac Con of Munster and Ailill Ólomm, his foster father, and Éogan, his

<sup>48</sup> K. Meyer: *Fianaigeacht*; pp.xv-xxiv.

<sup>49</sup> For Fothadh Canann's father Mac Con see this section, sub-section: the role of the *Cath Maige Mucrama* texts.

<sup>50</sup> M. O'Daly (ed.): *Cath Maige Mucrainhe*; Dublin (Irish Texts Society) 1975;p.1.

<sup>51</sup> O'Daly, op.cit. pp1-5. See ibid. for previous editions of the CMM tales and a list of related texts belonging to the same context.

foster brother. After defeat in the battle of Cenn Abrat, Mac Con flees to Scotland and spends seven years in exile. With an army provided by the king of Scotland - effectively a force of invaders - Mac Con returns and defeats the combined forces of Éogan and Art mac Cuinn in the battle of Mag Mucrama. Éogan and Art are killed and Mac Con takes the kingship of Tara until Cormac mac Airt is revealed as the rightful prince by a just judgement. Mac Con submits to him and returns to Munster to Ailill who has him killed by Ferchess mac Commoin.

Of these four tales, CMM gives the fullest account of these events; a shorter version with some variation in detail is found in *Scéla Moshauluim*. *Scéla Éogain* concentrates on the career of Cormac mac Airt from his conception until his accession to the throne of Tara after correcting Mac Con's bad judgement. *Cath Cinn Abrat* describes Mac Con's defeat at that battle, which led to his exile in Scotland.

The significance of the CMM tales for the context of the *Cath Gabhra* ballads lies partly in the appearance in *Scéla Moshauluim* of Fionn in the unusually subordinate role of Mac Con's champion who kills Mac Con's slayer Ferchess in revenge after seven years. In this passage Fionn appears twice in his more familiar role as seer-figure by means of the *imbais for-osnai*, first when he warns Mac Con of the pursuing Ferchess but is ignored and later when he foresees the death of Ferchess.<sup>52</sup> Fionn is here associated with Mac Con in the context of the latter's conflict with Ailill Ólomm subsequent to Mac Con's voluntary relinquishing of the kingship of Tara. Fionn is also mentioned as ally of Mac Con in the battle of Cenn Abrat in *Cath Cinn Abrat*; here, he is referred to explicitly as Mac Con's maternal cousin<sup>53</sup> and, more importantly, *rígfhénnid fían nÉrend*.<sup>54</sup> While CCA likewise describes a significant event in the conflict between Mac Con and Ailill Ólomm, mention of Fionn's presence on Mac Con's side at the battle has also implications for Fionn's relationship with the Tara dynasty. If Fionn appears as a supporter of Mac Con previous to his exile in Scotland and at the end of Mac Con's career it is not unreasonable to suppose his presence at the battle of Mag Mucrama, although unrecorded by the present CMM texts, as a possibility; in this battle, Mac Con was opposed not only by Ailill Ólomm and his son Éogan but also by Art mac Cuinn who was killed in it. Such a suggestion may furnish a possible explanation for the continued rivalry between the Tara dynasty and Fionn. It also casts an interesting sidelight on the reference to the tributes demanded by Fionn and the *Fían* in *Mór*

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<sup>52</sup> O'Daly, op.cit. pp.82-85.

<sup>53</sup> His mother's name is given as Fuinche ingen Dáiri. This is in marked contrast with the more common (later?) tradition that Fionn was the son of Múirne daughter of Tadhg mac Núadha.

<sup>54</sup> O'Daly, op.cit. pp.88-89.



*anocht mo chumha féin*, q.6; this could perhaps be explained as a covert claim to the kingship of Tara, or even as potential evidence that Fionn has replaced the figure of Mac Con in the role of claimant of the kingship, who after all attained that honour. Such a replacement process becomes a more attractive concept if we consider the way in which Fionn came to overshadow all other *fian*-leaders in the course of time;<sup>55</sup> Mac Con himself was known as a *fian*-leader.<sup>56</sup> The portrayal of Fionn in a role subordinate to Mac Con in the two CMM tales contrasts correspondingly with his portrayal in *Mór anocht...* where the battle of Mag Mucrama and Art mac Cuinn are mentioned explicitly in a way which lays the blame on the *Fian* and - by implication - Fionn (q.5); there is no mention of Mac Con or Ailill Ólomm in this context and it even appears that the battle of Gabhair is meant to appear as an event that was brought about in order to take revenge for the battle of Mag Mucrama.

Mac Con himself appears in *Mór anocht...* (BDL version) in an oblique but significant way. Oisean relates to Patrick how the *Fian* sent for Mac Con's son Fathadh Canann to lead them and to take the kingship of Ireland (qq.13-16). This would seem to reflect the situation that applied in the CMM tales, since Fionn himself was still alive after the battle of Gabhair, so that bypassing him in this way appears a little strange considering how he is portrayed in qq.42-51 of the ballad. Here, Fionn is quite unequivocally a leader figure who is sure of his own position and its demands and to whom due respect is accorded by the survivors of the *Fian*. There is even another reference to Art mac Cuinn in q.47 which links up with the reference to the battle of Mucrama in q.5 but Mac Con is again conspicuously absent. While the disparate CMM references in *Mór anocht...* do not constitute strong evidence for direct borrowing, it appears that the CMM tales influenced the ballad in a less tangible but more complex way which may very well involve Fionn taking over the role played previously by Mac Con.<sup>57</sup> In the type of Irish versions of this ballad represented by Ó Siochfhradha Mac Con appears in two instances. The first of these is in the six-line unit S.10, the extended equivalent of BDL q.16 while the second instance extends over S. qq.69 and 70 which are not represented in BDL; here, Mac Con is even called *Lugha mac Con mic Maicniadh* in q.70b.

One instance of possible influence from the CMM tales, *Scéla Moshauluim* in particular, occurs in *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*. This concerns the spear of Cairbre

<sup>55</sup> Meyer op.cit. pp.xiv-xv.

<sup>56</sup> Meyer, op.cit. p.xiii.

<sup>57</sup> A takeover process of a clearer kind can be observed in the ballad 'The Girl with the Mantle' in which an originally Arthurian text is successfully usurped by characters from the Fionn-context. Certain Scottish versions of the ballad of Fraoch show an attempt to attach this text to a Fionn-context as well although in a far less convincing manner.

which kills both Osgar and Cairbre, according to *Innis dúinn a Oisín* (qq.55-57, Ó Siochfhradha) where there is a more general reference to Cairbre in q.55b: *Agá raibh na hairm nimhe*. Cairbre's spear and the wounds it inflicted on Osgar are told of in *Mór anocht...* as well (qq.31-32) but a more significant reference to this weapon occurs in *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* where it is called *an t-sleagh shéanta* (q.11b).<sup>58</sup> This is paralleled by the spear which kills Mac Con in *Scéla Moshauluim*; Ferchess, who casts the spear, first chants a spell over it.<sup>59</sup> More information on this spear is available in the Annals of Tigernach in an entry about the battle of Cenn Abrat where it is identified as the same spear that wounded Mac Con in this battle; its name was *Rindcne* and its original owner Ailill Ólomm.<sup>60</sup> It is tempting to suggest borrowing from the CMM tales to *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* on the grounds of royal ownership and special properties conferred by enchantment of the spears but other weapons with special properties are attributed to heroes in other contexts as well, such as Cú Chulainn's well-known *gai bolga*. In a ballad context, there are of course the weapons Fionn and his companions obtained in *Duan na Ceàrdaich*. The DF version (DF XXVI), q.41a, tells of the eight swords and nine spears they got: *Tugaid duinn na hairm shénta*; qq.42-44 name the swords and assign them to their respective owners: Fionn got *Mac an Luin*, Diarmaid owned the *Drithlinn*, the *Créachtach* belonged to Caoilte, Oisín got *Gearr na gColann*, Mac Lughach's sword was the *Éachtach*, and the remaining three swords *Fead*, *Fí* and *Fosgadh* went to the three sons of the Áoncheard Berra.<sup>61</sup>

An interesting instance of potential influence from the CMM tales occurs in *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, qq.30-31 (Ó Siochfhradha), where Beinne mac Breasail offers his assistance, together with the *fian* of Britain, to Osgar and is promptly killed by Caireall's spear during the quarrel between Osgar and Caireall; Osgar immediately turns to Caireall and reproaches him which leads to their combat. Beinne's *fian* is mentioned again in q.42 in a list of casualties. A Beinne Britt ('the Briton'), presumably the leader of the British contingent, appears as one of the leaders of Mac Con's forces in the battle of Mag Mucrama, as told in CMM.<sup>62</sup> He is killed by Mac Con's ally Lugaid Lágae as Beinne Britt was in the process of cutting off the head of Ailill Ólomm's son Éogan who was also Lugaid's nephew. Mac Con then reproaches

<sup>58</sup> 'The charmed or enchanted spear.'

<sup>59</sup> O'Daly, op.cit. p..84-85.

<sup>60</sup> Wh. Stokes: 'The Annals of Tigernach. Second Fragment', pp.10-11.

<sup>61</sup> There is considerable variation in Scottish versions in the names of swords and their owners although Fionn's sword *Mac an Luin* is mentioned in many cases.

<sup>62</sup> In a Scottish context, he is found as Briot in a seventeenth century Campbell genealogy which states the British origin of that clan. See R.I. Black: 'A Manuscript of Cathal Mac Muireadhaigh' in: *Celtica* 10 (1973); pp.200 and 207.

Lugaid Lágae for his deed.<sup>63</sup> The similarities are too obvious to be the result of coincidence.

The above puts a different perspective on Osgar mac Garaidh's coming from Scotland (q.22) which could be interpreted as a parallel to Mac Con's return from exile before the battle of Mag Mucrama. If this was derived from CMM, it must also be admitted that the ballad fits mac Garaidh's implied exile into the general scheme provided by the clanna Baoisgne-clanna Morna feud (q.23) but gives no explicit reason for it. It has to be noted, too, that the *fian* of Scotland appear among the allies of the *Fian* (q.14), and not alongside mac Garaidh, which speaks in favour of a CMM derivation.

On a textual level, there is an instance of parallel use of a motif in the two texts. A battle run in CMM contains the phrase *findnél na cailce 7 ind áeil dochum inna nél asnaib scíatha[ib] 7 asnaib boccóitib*.<sup>64</sup> This motif is also employed in q.53 which runs:

*D'éirigh trí ceatha  
Os a gcionn isna cliathaibh -  
Cith fola, cith teine,  
Cith cailce dá sgíathaibh.*

However, the stylistic differences go further than the difference between poetry and prose. The CMM passage, only partially quoted above, uses the devices of parallelism and duplication of near-equivalent terms while the quatrain in *Innis dúinn a Oisín* employs triplication using non-equivalent terms. There is a difference in balance of imagery, too: CMM presents the cloud of chalk that rises from the shields as an element within a sequence of parts of equal value while the ballad quatrain gives some prominence to the motif by devoting an entire line to it and by making it the final item of the three. The occurrence of this particular motif in both texts could of course be no more than coincidence - considering the flexibility of such motifs and imagery in Irish and Scottish literature in general - were it not for the two other examples which appear to have been influenced by CMM. The cumulative evidence thus seems to favour the view that a textual link exists between CMM and *Innis dúinn a Oisín*. This link probably did not consist of direct borrowing but perhaps

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<sup>63</sup> O'Daly, op.cit. pp.52-53 and 56-57.

<sup>64</sup> O'Daly, op.cit. p.54.

rather in drawing on an intermediary source containing material pertaining to the battle of Gabhra in which elements derived from CMM had been incorporated.<sup>65</sup>

A similar situation appears to apply to DF XXXIX, *A Oisín cíá in feart dona*, q.18a where a Fionn mac Breasail is mentioned in a list of members and supporters of the *Fian*, perhaps an uncertain echo of the Beinne mac Breasail of *Innis dúinn a Oisín*. Qq.33 and 34 tell of Cairbre's sending of messengers to Scotland to Osgar mac Garaidh who gathers his men and sails to Ireland; as in *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, there is no explanation why he is in Scotland. Both ballads would thus appear to make use of sources that likely contained CMM material as well.<sup>66</sup>

## Section c: Textual Material

### Plot summaries

A summary of the different plot structure of the three most important core texts serves as a useful preliminary; namely *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* and the 'Scottish Variant.'

#### *Innis dúinn a Oisín*

The most common title for the Irish ballad *Innis dúinn a Oisín* is *Laoidh Chatha Gabhra*. *Tuairisg/Tuarasgabháil Chatha Gabhra* is given occasionally (RIA 23 L 34, 3 B 28, 23 O 79 and NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.7.) but since the core text *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* generally has the same title this could lead to confusion. *Marbhrann Osgair* (RIA 23 L 8) and *An Cath Gabhra* (RIA 23 L 5) are further alternative titles for *Innis dúinn a Oisín*. It begins with an extended Patrick-Oisín dialogue in which Patrick asks for the names of the most prominent heroes of the *Fian* and for the names of the protagonists at the battle of Gabhair. Oisín answers Patrick's questions and ends with a lengthy list of the *Fian*'s enemies at the battle; Fionn is described as being absent in Rome, having left Oisín in charge. Oisín's

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<sup>65</sup> *Innis dúinn a Oisín* shows considerable complexity in the sources it draws upon. See chapter 5, section b: *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne*, *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* for a full discussion of the situation, with particular reference to q.53.

<sup>66</sup> For the relationship between *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and *A Oisín cíá in feart dona* see chapter 5, section a: *A Oisín cíá in feart dona*.



following account of the battle itself begins with the enemy side, detailing how Cairbre Lifeachair induces Osgar the son of Garaidh (mac Garaidh) to lead the attack against Osgar the son of Oisín. The latter requests Oisín's and Cairioll's permission to begin the battle but is refused by Cairioll; a fight between them is quelled with great difficulty, and with heavy losses, by the *Fian*. Then Osgar and the *Fian* attack their opponents and the combat between Mac Garaidh and Osgar is described; Osgar kills mac Garaidh but is wounded. The ensuing combat between Cairbre and Osgar is dealt with in a curiously summary fashion: Cairbre and his son are killed but the death of Osgar is merely implied. Another question by Patrick is followed by a list of those killed by Osgar in the battle, followed by a more general list of the slain; this second list contains a quatrain telling of Osgar's death. Two quatrains of Patrick-Oisín dialogue conclude the account of the battle of Gabhair and there are some texts which end here.<sup>67</sup> Most texts, however, attach the ancillary text *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* to the ballad and the *dúnadh* indicates that this may be an original feature of the ballad or at least a development which has been fitted to the ballad with great care. Although Oisín refers to his account of the battle of Gabhair in *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* there is nothing else that necessarily connects the two texts.

*Innis dúinn a Oisín* does not provide any background to the battle of Gabhair. Perhaps this indicates that the audience was likely to be familiar with this, but the above evidence of historical sources appears to cast doubt on this suggestion. This ballad seems not entirely satisfactory as an account of the battle of Gabhair. Too much is left out or glossed over, and the various lists and Patrick-Oisín dialogues add an awkward element of ponderousness to the compelling pace of the central description of events during the battle.

### *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*

*Mór anocht mo chumha féin* is found in both Ireland and Scotland and the differences between versions from both countries are most appropriately discussed below.<sup>68</sup> The typical Irish variant of this ballad begins with Oisín's account of the background to the battle of Gabhair, addressed to Patrick: despite the *Fian*'s peaceful disposition Cairbre gathers an army to destroy them, motivated by the memory of their long-standing feud; the battle of Magh Mucraimhe and the death of Art are mentioned in particular. In turn, Oisín and the *Fian* summon their allies to support them in this crisis. Patrick then interrupts and asks how the *Fian* could have met a

<sup>67</sup> For instance RIA 23 O 79 and NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.7.

<sup>68</sup> See chapter 6, section a: The Parallel Texts: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

threat posed by invaders after the disastrous battle. Oisín admits that they would not have been able to do so and tells of the terrible losses they sustained at the battle. In a short dialogue Patrick asks for an account of Osgar's valour and his death in the battle. Oisín stresses Osgar's pre-eminence and then switches to the aftermath of the battle: the survivors gather around the dying Osgar and Oisín once more emphasises the enormity of the slaughter. Then Oisín describes how he found his son and relates the dialogue between them. Caoilte arrives, and in the dialogue between Osgar and him Osgar's wounds inflicted by Cairbre's spear are described. The survivors carry Osgar away from the battlefield. Then Fionn arrives after his unexplained absence and another dialogue follows which turns into a monologue uttered by Fionn detailing the loss of power, influence and tributes he will suffer now that Osgar is about to die. Then Osgar dies and Oisín describes the sorrow of the survivors for Osgar's death above all others; even Fionn weeps for Osgar. The survivors begin the task of burying the slain and a short list of prominent heroes who fell in the battle follows; Osgar mac Garaidh and Osgar the son of the king of Lochlann are mentioned. There is a *dúnadh* before the quatrain describing the burial of the three Osgars; this is where BDL, the oldest extant version, ends.

*Mór anocht mo chumha féin* provides us with some background to the battle of Gabhair. Cairbre Lifeachair, who is initially cast as the villain, subsequently drops out of the ballad without a trace and the ballad turns into a detailed account of Osgar's death, emphasising the aspect of 'dying well.' Except for an indication of the large number of slain participants the actual battle is not described at all. Again, this ballad does not provide a fully satisfactory account of events and even as a conventional elegy it is not entirely convincing since it concentrates more on the feelings and attitudes of the survivors, especially Fionn and Oisín, than on the outstanding qualities of its subject Osgar. Seen as a personal and emotional account of Osgar's death put into the mouth of his father, the ballad is very effective, making especially good use of the device of Oisín's suddenly addressing Patrick at particularly emotionally charged moments.

### The Scottish Variant

The plot of the Scottish Variant in its most complete form gives a different view of the battle of Gabhair. The initial setting pictures Oisean clearly as a survivor who relates events at the battle but no explicit mention is made throughout the ballad of Patrick. The ballad introduces its topic as the death of both Osgar and Cairbre in the battle of Gabhair and Cairbre's spear is given a prominent mention. Then follows



a passage telling of the omens Osgar encounters before the battle: a raven and the fairy washerwoman who is seen washing the bloody garments of those who are to die in battle. These omens are clearly imported from the sphere of popular belief and superstition. The background to the battle is given: during Fionn's absence Cairbre usurps and suppresses Ireland and then invites Osgar and the *Fian* to Tara to a feast. At the end of the feast Cairbre requests an exchange of spearheads from Osgar; this leads to an argument between them and finally to mutual challenges. The battle begins on the following morning and is followed by a list which mentions groups of warriors mostly killed by Osgar. Finally Osgar and Cairbre meet; Cairbre's spear wounds Osgar and Osgar kills Cairbre with a spearcast of his own. Osgar then challenges and kills Cairbre's son Art. This ends the battle and Osgar asks the *Fian* to bear him away. Fionn arrives and in a dialogue with Osgar compares Osgar's wounds with wounds sustained in earlier conflicts but Osgar indicates that this time his wounds are fatal. His death is implied at this point since Fionn weeps and utters a lament for Osgar; the corpse is borne away by the survivors of the *Fian* and a description of the mourning caused by Osgar's death finishes the ballad.

Unlike *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*, the Scottish Variant actually contains a complete plot. It offers a plausible motivation for the battle, although at variance with the viewpoint of history; the battle is described in some detail, with the notable absence of Osgar mae Garaidh; and Osgar's death exemplifies the philosophy of 'dying well'. The element of elegy is present in Fionn's lament and the general mourning of the *Fian* but explicit praise of Osgar's heroic qualities is only rudimentary. Of the three most important core texts, the Scottish Variant is the one that works best; it is also the text which shows the most developments that differ from the other core texts.<sup>69</sup>

### Core texts and ancillary texts

Irish tradition in particular displays frequent examples of combinations of core and ancillary texts; that is, *Cath Gabhra* ballads have attracted other ballads with a connection to the battle of Gabhair although this connection is not a necessary criterion. All of these ancillary texts exist as separate ballads, and except for the 'Praise of Osgar' are found in a Scottish context as well. The most spectacular example of such a combination is found in O'Kearney's *Tuarusgabhail Chatha Ghabhra, maille re h-Oisín mac Fhinn, do Phatric*<sup>70</sup> which begins with the ancillary

<sup>69</sup> For a full discussion of the Scottish Variant see chapter 5, section c: the Scottish Variant.

<sup>70</sup> TOS I, pp.68-133.

text *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne*, continues with the core text *Innis dúinn, a Oisín* and its ancillary text *Innis dom a Phádraig*, and ends with the core text *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*, running to a total of 180 quatrains.<sup>71</sup> I have not yet encountered any other version which combines core and ancillary texts in this way so that the suggestion that O'Kearney, who gives no source for his material, compiled his text especially for publication cannot be dismissed at this point.<sup>72</sup>

In Scottish tradition, the extant versions of the *Cath Gabhra* ballads are not directly connected to ballads that have an ancillary function in Ireland; as there do not appear to be any Scottish versions of the core text *Innis dúinn, a Oisín*, which frequently combines with the ancillary text *Innis dúinn, a Phádraig*, possibilities are limited. The Scottish Variant, however, forms a set of related core texts with characteristics which do not appear to be present in extant Irish manuscripts.

### The DF texts

The earliest example of an Irish core text is extant in DF XXXIX, *A Oisín cía in feart dona*.<sup>73</sup> It is perhaps significant that DF does not include any of the other core texts or any of the ancillary texts. However, the themes of two of the ancillary ballads are present in DF LII (*Éirigh súas a Osgair*), a poem praising Osgar's valour,<sup>74</sup> and DF LVII (*A Oisín as fada do shuan*), a dialogue between Patrick and Oisín.<sup>75</sup>

Of these, *Éirigh súas a Osgair* is clearly not a version either of *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* or of its companion piece *Osgar iolbhuadhach*; it appears to be a rare text which seems to be only attested here and in the *Acallam*.<sup>76</sup>

The dialogue ballad *A Oisín as fada do shuan* occurs very frequently in Irish manuscripts but is only occasionally found in Scotland; again, it is not a related version of, or derived from, *Innis dúinn a Phádraig*. The DF version is one that fits well into the picture presented by other versions such as John O'Daly's,<sup>77</sup> a composite version published by Ó Siochfhradha,<sup>78</sup> and a short/fragmentary Scottish version

<sup>71</sup> A manuscript version, with a number of minor differences, exists in RIA 23 M 2, written by O'Kearney as well. This may have served as an exemplar for the printed version.

<sup>72</sup> See, however, the apparent evidence of some versions of *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne* in chapter 5 section b: *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne*, *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* where two more long versions are discussed.

<sup>73</sup> DF II; pp.32-57.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* pp.176-177.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* pp.204-215.

<sup>76</sup> Stokes and Windisch, pp.29-30.

<sup>77</sup> J. O'Daly (ed.): *Laoithe Fiannaigheachta* (TOS vol. IV); Dublin 1859; pp.2-63.

<sup>78</sup> P. Ó Siochfhradha: *Laoithe na Féinne*; pp.1-5.

from NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.12.<sup>79</sup> This dialogue ballad presents a special set of problems in its later form in Irish manuscripts as it is often extended to form a framework which includes a number of other ballads.<sup>80</sup>

*Innis dúinn a Oisín and Éirigh a Osgair fhéil*

Some versions of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* have acquired a number of quatrains belonging to the ancillary text called the 'Praise of Osgar' beginning *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil*; e.g. RIA 23 L 8, 23 L 5 and 3 B 28, all dating to the early nineteenth century and written by Co. Waterford scribes.<sup>81</sup> A looser connection between *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* and *Innis dúinn a Oisín* is present in some cases; in RIA F V 5 *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* follows *Innis dúinn a Oisín* directly and Ó Siochfhradha prints *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* preceding *Innis dúinn a Oisín*.

In manuscripts, *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* is more commonly associated with the 'Praise of Goll,' also frequently ascribed to Fearghus, of which two different texts occur (*Goll mór mileata* and *Árd aigne Ghuill* - the latter is also found in BDL XII), and with another poem in praise of Osgar, *Osgar iolbhuadhach*. Examples of this association are found in RIA 3 B 9 (*Éirigh...* and *Árd aigne Ghuill*), 24 M 2 (all four), 23 C 30 (all four), and 23 L 24 (all four). All texts appear independently as well.

Complete versions of *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* all have 21 quatrains and there is very little variation discernible. Ó Siochfhradha and Miss Brooke form one group of versions and another is represented by RIA F V 5 and 23 C 30 where qq.5 and 6 of Ó Siochfhradha appear in reverse order. A third group is represented by TOS, RIA 24 M 2 and 23 L 34 where qq.5 and 6 again are found in reverse order and there is also a slightly greater amount of textual variation but on the whole the general agreement of versions is remarkable. This agreement is particularly striking in the case of order of quatrains because there is no plot which requires a particular sequence of events or quatrains in this type of praise poem. This feature leads me to suspect that *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* and its companion piece *Osgar iolbhuadhach*, whose eighteen quatrains likewise show very little variation, were transmitted primarily in a scribal context. A

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<sup>79</sup> *Rel.Celt.* I; pp.164-165

<sup>80</sup> A discussion of this complex situation is not possible in the present context.

<sup>81</sup> As I have only investigated a sample of RIA versions it is quite possible that the Waterford connection is only apparent and the evidence of other versions might lead to a different picture. See also chapter 5, section d, sub-section: Versions of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* (the Waterford type). RIA 23 L 8 and 3 B 28 are given in the Appendix, Part 1, Irish Texts: section a: Irish Versions of *Innis dúinn a Oisín*.

greater amount of variation in *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* is found in the quatrains incorporated in the three texts of the Waterford *Innis dúinn a Oisín* although there is widespread agreement between the Waterford texts.

The full text of *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* combines a large amount of common panegyric imagery with references to events at the battle of Gabhair that tie in well with the plot of *Innis dúinn a Oisín*. Osgar mac Garaidh is mentioned (Ó Siochfhradha q.3b) as well as Cairbre (q.4a and q.7d) and Fionn's absence is referred to in q.11d. The battle of Gabhair is mentioned in q.6d and q.17b. Q.9 could be taken as a reference to the slaughter of heroes committed by Osgar at the battle. The quatrains incorporated in *Innis dúinn a Oisín* preserve a fair number of these references to the battle. Osgar mac Garaidh appears in q. 2b of RIA 23 L 8. Q.3 incites Osgar to attack the opposing kings; these kings are also mentioned in q.2cd. The line *A mhic Oisín na mbeimionn* (q.4a) could well be a reflex of the common phrase *cath Gabhra na mbeimionn*. Q.6d refers to Fionn's absence, q.7c mentions the location Gabhair, and the final admonition in q.8d (*Bi a dtosach an chatha*) could also be taken as a reference to the battle. This concentration of battle references appears to indicate that these quatrains were chosen carefully to fit into the framework of *Innis dúinn a Oisín*. The first quatrain of the praise poem is likewise an obvious choice since it introduces Osgar to whom the incitement is addressed. Q.5, the only one without a reference to events at the battle, may have been chosen for its striking and somewhat sinister imagery involving the ravens expecting their share of the slaughter.

The most notable difference of *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* is that it is set at the crucial point of time immediately preceding the battle while all other texts are retrospective in their outlook. Its resulting perspective of optimism and confidence in winning the battle due to Osgar's valour sets it apart from the atmosphere of disaster that pervades all other texts. The original 'redactor' who inserted the eight quatrains from *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* into *Innis dúinn a Oisín* must have been aware of this contrast and his choice of quatrains as well as the point of insertion seem to indicate that it was his intention to heighten tension by creating a delay in the action. 'Standard' versions of *Innis duinn a Oisín* already have a similar device in three quatrains describing a general attack by the *Fian* and the resulting casualties before focusing on Osgar's deeds. This is one reason why the insertion of the *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* quatrains fails to be entirely convincing: the quatrain telling of the *Fian's* attack follows on logically from the quatrain telling of Fearghus' incitement to battle but is not linked convincingly to the last of the inserted quatrains. Another slight flaw in construction is evident in the Fearghus-quatrain in that all versions I consulted read

'gar mbrostughadh or something very similar; even the three versions incorporating the *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* quatrains have not adapted this line in any way so that the quatrains addressing Osgar show an uncomfortable discrepancy to the second person plural form in the preceding quatrain. The insertion of the *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* quatrains has to be regarded as less than successful, particularly since the second person plural form is paralleled by a matching first person plural form in the quatrain which resumes the original ballad.

### *Innis dúinn a Oisín and Innis dúinn a Phádraig*

The twenty quatrains of dialogue between Oisín and Patrick that conclude many versions of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* are very closely related to part of the dialogue ballad *Innis dúinn a Phádraig*. This ancillary text exists independently in Scotland but appears to be found only in its ancillary manifestations in Ireland. The metre of *Innis dúinn a Phádraig*, *rionnaird*, is likely to have facilitated the attachment of these quatrains to *Innis dúinn a Oisín*; the similarity of the titles of both texts, the repeated mention of the battle of Gabhair in *Innis dúinn a Phádraig*, and the shared dialogue structure may all have suggested the combination of the two texts as well. The earliest surviving text of *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* is BDL XI and it is worth noting that the sequence of quatrains of the BDL text is closely mirrored by the ancillary versions although BDL qq.4, 10, 11, 18 and 20-35 are not represented here. Conversely, qq.4-6 of the ancillary texts have no BDL equivalent to fill the gap left by the omission of BDL qq.10-11; q.20 appears to be a quatrain composed specifically to conclude the poem since it displays the *dúnadh 'gan innsin.*'

Of a total of fourteen versions of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* which I investigated in detail seven preserve the twenty quatrains of *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* intact and in identical sequence.<sup>82</sup> Only two<sup>83</sup> show no trace of *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* and their concluding quatrain is the equivalent of Ó Siochfhradha q.73, beginning *Dob iomdha linnte fola*; this quatrain comes at the end of Oisín's final list of slain heroes and represents the end of an episode. A textual link exists between these two versions and RIA 23 L 34 which preserves eighteen of the twenty quatrains of *Innis dúinn a Phádraig*; qq.4 and 5 are missing and it is perhaps significant to note that these are quatrains without a BDL equivalent.<sup>84</sup> The three versions which incorporate part of *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* contain a shortened version of *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* which

<sup>82</sup> TOS, RIA F V 5, 24 L 15, 23 O 35, 23 C 30, 24 P 7 and 23 Q 18.

<sup>83</sup> RIA 23 O 79 and NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.7.

<sup>84</sup> Although the themes of these two quatrains, hounds and hunting, are present in BDL qq.23-24.



misses out qq.11-19; RIA 23 L 5 also misses out q.5. All three versions preserve the final quatrain with its *dúnadh* although both RIA 23 L 8 and 3 B 28 show the order of lines acbd. Finally, there is Ó Siochfhradha's composite version which concludes with q.10 of *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* like the three previous versions but Ó Siochfhradha leaves out the *dúnadh*-quatrain. This is odd since four of the seven RIA versions he used display all twenty quatrains.<sup>85</sup> The author points out that there are indeed a number of additional quatrains to the ballad in certain versions but justifies his decision to leave them out with the remark that they also appear in the ballad *Agallamh Oisín agus Phádraig* and other unspecified texts. While I cannot comment on those unspecified texts I can confirm that in Ó Siochfhradha's own text of this long compilation, beginning *Oisín is fada do shuan*,<sup>86</sup> qq.11-14 of *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* appear as qq.214-217 and qq.15-19 are found as qq.203-207, most of them with some changes but still recognisably the same; the concluding q.20 does not appear to be present here.

Metre is only of limited use in determining whether these quatrains did originally come from *Oisín is fada do shuan*. Many of them show a high incidence of heptasyllabic lines with *rannaigheacht bheag*-type end rhyme in *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* but internal rhymes within couplets are not used consistently enough to be conclusive. *Rannaigheacht bheag* appears to be the metre used predominantly in *Oisín is fada do shuan* although inconsistencies occur throughout, and also in the quatrains in question here. Whether *Oisín is fada do shuan* borrowed from *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* (or its ancillary manifestation) or vice versa is too complex and far-reaching a problem to be discussed satisfactorily in the present context. Q.13/217 is a particularly interesting one with regard to its metre. In the *Innis dúinn a Phádraig* quatrains and BDL q.12 its metre is *Ae fhreislighe* (7<sup>3</sup> 7<sup>2</sup>),<sup>87</sup> here quoted from RIA F V 5 q.90(=q.13 of the *Innis dúinn a Phádraig*-sequence) while in *Oisín is fada do shuan* (Ó Siochfhradha q.217) it does not even display a satisfactory rhyme scheme:

<sup>85</sup> RIA 23 O 35, F V 5, 24 L 15 and 23 L 34. Ó Siochfhradha's list of sources is best taken with a grain of salt. RIA 24 A 9 does not appear to contain a version of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* according to the RIA catalogue; 24 C 15 only has a version of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*; and 23 L 24 appears to be a misprint for 23 L 34. 24 M 2 I have not consulted but since it contains a *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne* text of 110qq. it would seem to be close to the TOS version which incorporates the 20qq.

<sup>86</sup> Ó Siochfhradha, op. cit. pp.1-23.

<sup>87</sup> Murphy, op.cit. p.63, points out its relationship with *rannaigheacht bheag* in its alternative name *cró cumaig etir rannaigecht mbic ocus casbairdne*. See also Meek, HC, notes to BDL XI, section v: line annotation to l.45.



## RIA F V 5

*Ni racha an chuil chrónánach*  
*No an dadamh san ngath gréine*  
*Gan fhios don Rígh mhordhalach*  
*Fa dhídean a sgeithe.*

## Ó Siochfhradha

*Ní rachadh an chuil chrónánach*  
*Ná fós an gath gréine*  
*Gan fios don rígh neamhdha*  
*Isteach don chathair naomhtha.*

Of the relevant versions of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* which I consulted only TOS has the line *Isteach don chathair naomhtha*, the others have various orthographic variants of *Fa dhídean a sgeithe*. Despite the lack of one syllable this line is more satisfactory in providing a better end-rhyme with corresponding long vowels but imperfect consonantal rhyme between *gréine* : *sgeithe*. BDL XI q.12d runs *Ní ria fá bhil a sgeithe* which gives seven syllables as required, corresponding to RIA F V 5 and other Irish manuscript sources. Ó Siochfhradha's line may, however, be typical of Irish versions of *Oisín is fada do shuan* which I have not investigated. Briefly, Scottish versions of this ballad, usually beginning *Innis dhuinn a Phàdraig* but incorporating the quatrain beginning *Oisein gur fada do shuan*, follow the BDL evidence regarding this quatrain rather than Ó Siochfhradha. There is no evidence of ancillary use of this ballad but independent versions appear frequently.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> A number of representative examples are printed in LF, pp.40-47.

## **Chapter 5: Irish Core Texts**

### **Section a: *A Oisín cíá in feart dona***

*A Oisín, cíá in feart dona*<sup>1</sup> resembles *Innis dúinn*, a *Oisín* in plot but there is little in either ballad that indicates a direct textual relationship.

The initial Patrick-Oisín dialogue of *A Oisín...* (qq.1-9) centres on the grave of Osgar mac Garaidh, in contrast with *Innis dúinn...* (qq.1-8) where Patrick asks for the names of certain prominent heroes; the atmosphere of doom and disaster that intensifies throughout the ballad in all core texts is thus indicated right from the beginning in *A Oisín...* while the introductory episode of *Innis dúinn...* could lead into any sort of ballad involving one or more of the characters it names.

Fionn's journey to Rome, the rather non-committal *Air thuras slighe na Rómha* of *Innis dúinn...* (qq.9-10), appears as a pilgrimage with a religious motive in *A Oisín...* (qq.10-12). This less than subtle device attempts to include Fionn in the Christian fold but fails to be entirely successful since in the preceding dialogue Patrick exhorts Oisín to accept Christianity - if Fionn was pious enough to go on a pilgrimage, Patrick's task in converting Oisín should have been a relatively easy one but tradition, especially ballad tradition, does not bear this out. The concluding ancillary dialogue of controversy between Patrick and Oisín in *Innis dúinn...* gives a good example of this and Patrick even states unequivocally that Fionn and the other heroes are consigned to hell. This casts some doubt on the 'pilgrimage'-theory in *Innis dúinn...*: Fionn may also be pictured on a journey to gather tribute. Neither *Innis dúinn...* nor *A Oisín...* take up the thread of Fionn's absence again. While this saves Fionn the indignity of being present at the greatest disaster in the history of the *Fian* I am not convinced that this is the reason behind his absence since loose threads of plot are generally avoided in the ballads. If we consider that Fionn returns from an unexplained absence in *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* to play a prominent role I cannot help wondering whether the 'pilgrimage'-episode is not an unexploited reflex of a theme present in *Mór anocht...* In this context it is interesting to note that both *Mór anocht...* and *A Oisín...* are composed in a *deibhidhe*-type metre although this is a minor point since *deibhidhe* is an extremely popular metre for ballads and there is no direct textual overlap. However, the 'pilgrimage'-episode might be used to argue that

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<sup>1</sup> DF XXXIX, printed in DF II, pp.32-57.

it is conceivable that *Innis dúinn...* was consciously modelled on *A Oisín...* or vice versa.

*A Oisín...* then continues with the juxtaposition of Cairbre Lifeachair and the remainder of the *Fian* led by Oisín (qq.13-21). *Innis dúinn...* likewise gives a list (qq.11-19) which, however, contains names of heroes on both sides of the conflict. It is curious to note that on the side of the *Fian* and their allies there is no overlap in the names mentioned in the corresponding passages; in fact the only name that both ballads share here is that of Cairbre Lifeachair - Oisín's presence is merely implied in *Innis dúinn...*

The next episode in *A Oisín...* is not shared by *Innis dúinn...* and provides a reason for the battle: Cairbre demands that the *Fian* give up their hunting privileges and is refused by Osgar and mac Lughach (qq.22-29). Perhaps this episode may be taken to indicate that *A Oisín...* was modelled on *Innis dúinn...* and this episode was created to improve the plot, similar to the development in the Scottish Variant which provides a motivation for the battle. Conversely, it may have dropped out from *Innis dúinn...*

*A Oisín...* then gives a detailed account of events preceding the battle (qq.30-44). Cairbre gathers the men of Ulster and of Leinster and sends a message to Osgar mac Garaidh in Scotland. When mac Garaidh arrives Cairbre welcomes him and reminds him of the feud between the descendants of Morna and of Baoisgne. Aodhán king of Ulster suggests that mac Garaidh should challenge Osgar and mac Garaidh undertakes to do so after pointing out Osgar's superiority over all other heroes. In the corresponding episode in *Innis dúinn...* (qq.20-25) Cairbre asks mac Garaidh to challenge Osgar; when mac Garaidh points out Osgar's excellence Cairbre reminds him of past grievances against the descendants of Baoisgne and Cairbre's forces advance towards the *Fian*. Mac Garaidh's Scottish connection is mentioned as well but there is no trace of the king of Ulster; although an Aodhán appears in q.8d<sup>2</sup> he is not referred to as king of Ulster. It is possible to see the *A Oisín...* episode as an elaboration of the *Innis dúinn...* one. The following couplets may be cited as evidence for a connection between the two ballads:

*Nach raibh laoch ar talmhain*

*Do dhéanfadh comhrac Oscair.* (Innis dúinn... Ó Siochfhradha q.21cd)

*Ni imthigh talmhain na ttor*

*Láoch budh ioncomhlainn d' Osgar.* (*A Oisín...* q.43cd)

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<sup>2</sup> Aodhán geal ón Roca in the composite version printed by Ó Siochfhradha.

While there is an obvious difference in metre (quatrain-based in the *Innis dúinn...* example and couplet-based - *deibhidhe* - in the *A Oisín...* example) the similarity of imagery used in both couplets may be significant.

The episode describing the conflict between Osgar and Cairioll is unique to *Innis dúinn...* (qq.26-38). This is followed by a general account of the battle with emphasis on Osgar's valour (qq.39-46); the corresponding account in *A Oisín...* introduces the son of the king of Lochlann who engages, and is killed by, mac Garaidh (qq.45-62). Curiously, this character is the only one to be described in quatrains devoted exclusively to his praise (qq.46-48), despite the fact that he is best regarded as a minor figure in a non-essential sub-episode.

The combat between Osgar and mac Garaidh takes up eight quatrains in both *Innis dúinn...* (qq.47-54) and *A Oisín...* (qq.63-70); the *Innis dúinn...* account concentrates on the wounds the heroes inflict on each other and the weapons they destroy in their fight while the *A Oisín...* account is presented as Oisín's own recollection of the fight in more general terms. The image of the silence of the men of Ireland is the only one shared by both ballads in this episode (q.51a and c in *Innis dúinn...* and q.69ab in *A Oisín...*). This does not necessarily indicate a direct connection between the ballads as this image also occurs elsewhere and can be classed as a stock image; it is also found in Ó Siochfhradha's version of *Dearg mac Droithchill* in q.73<sup>3</sup> which is very reminiscent of the *A Oisín...* quatrain.

*Dearg* q.73cd                      *Is sochtaid fir Éireann uile*  
    *Le clos béimeann na hiorghuile.*

*A Oisín...* q.69ab              *Sochtaid fir Eirionn uile*  
    *Ag eisteacht re a n-urluidhe*

*Innis dúinn...* q.51abc *D'éisteadar Fir Éireann*  
    *[Gér chruaidh é an t-osadh,]*  
    *Le cloistin na mbéimeann*

Ó Siochfhradha's q.75, the only one of a similar kind present in the 'standard' *Dearg*, gives a slightly different image but is comparable in structure, particularly in its second couplet.

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<sup>3</sup> Ó Siochfhradha, *Laoithe na Féinne*; p.135.

The *Innis dúinn...* episode features another stock image in the 'floating quatrain' describing the showers of blood, fire and chalk that rise as a result of the heroes' fight; this is also found in certain Scottish versions of the *Dearg*, e.g. McLagan 113 (q.63):<sup>4</sup>

<i>Cith rine, cith cailce* cruaidh</i>	( <i>*cith cruaidh</i> )
<i>Do'n armaibh, 's do'n sgiathaibh* nuaigh</i>	( <i>*san uair</i> )
<i>Agus cith fola* da nimh</i>	( <i>*eile</i> )
<i>Bhiodh do lannaibh na mili.</i>	( <i>chneasuibh</i> ) <sup>5</sup>

Compare this with *Innis dúinn...* (Ó Siochfhradha q.53):

*D'éirigh trí ceatha*  
*Os a gcionn isna chliathaibh -*  
*Cith fola, cith teine*  
*Cith cailce dá sciathaibh.*

The imagery in both quatrains is recognisably the same; the verbal differences can be explained by the difference in metre: the *Dearg* is composed in a couplet-based *deibhidhe*-type metre while *Innis dúinn...* employs a quatrain-based metre.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that the respective quatrains telling of the silence of the men of Ireland are located close to the above quatrains in both cases: Ó Siochfhradha, *Innis dúinn...* q.51 and McLagan, *Dearg* q.62 which compares closely with the silence-quatrains quoted above:

*[Bhitheadar comhrac car greis*  
*Gus an d' thugadar a mor-theas]*  
*Gus na thosd fir Eirinn uile*  
*Ri clos bheamana na h-irghioll.*

There may be more than mere coincidence involved in the presence of two adjacent images in this type of version of the *Dearg* and *Innis dúinn....* The McLagan quatrain is, to my knowledge, only attested in Scottish versions of the *Dearg*.

<sup>4</sup> *Rel. Celt.* I, p.351.

<sup>5</sup> As the McLagan version implies by its variant readings, there is a fair amount of variation in this quatrain in oral tradition. *Rine* in line a appears to be an error for *teine*.

<sup>6</sup> Further instances of the occurrence of this particular quatrain are discussed in Chapter 3, section d: sub-section: Floating quatrains.

However, since a very similar quatrain appears also in a number of Scottish versions of *Conn mac an Deirg*, the classification of this quatrain or at least the imagery in it as a 'floating quatrain' or 'image' seems justified.<sup>7</sup> In addition, both the *Dearg* and *Conn mac an Deirg* are examples of invader-ballads; the quatrains above are placed in the context of a defender fighting an invader-figure. The figure of Osgar mac Garaidh in *Innis dúinn...* is portrayed in terms reminiscent of an invader-figure, despite his close association with Cairbre, and his exile in Scotland is mentioned in Ó Siochfhradha, q.22, giving mac Garaidh the explicit status of an invader. The prominence given to the single combat between Osgar and mac Garaidh is likewise paralleled by those episodes in invader-ballads which describe the defeat or death of the invader: in the *DF* version of the *Dearg* this takes up five quatrains (six in McLagan 113) and in *Innis dúinn...* (Ó Siochfhradha) eight. By contrast, the following episode in *Innis dúinn...*, describing the deaths of Cairbre, his son and Osgar himself, only takes up three quatrains.

Both ballads then continue with the fight between Osgar and Cairbre in which both are killed; *Innis dúinn...* tells of this in three quatrains (qq.55-57) and *A Oisín...* in six quatrains (qq.71-76). There are some slight differences here. While in *Innis dúinn...* spears are the only weapons mentioned *A Oisín...* goes into greater detail in the description of the fight, mentioning Cairbre's shield, sword and two spears, and Osgar's sword with which he beheads Cairbre. This is unusual since most other texts state that Osgar killed Cairbre with a spearcast, often using Cairbre's own spear which has just wounded Osgar. The death of Cairbre's son Art is only mentioned here in *Innis dúinn...* (q.57); *A Oisín...* mentions Art in the final list in q.86.

The extended list of casualties of the battle which follows in both ballads shows little overlap; in *Innis dúinn...* it takes up qq.58-75 and is introduced by a question from Patrick while in *A Oisín...* it takes up qq.77-88 and although Patrick does not prompt Oisín to furnish this list Oisín nevertheless addresses Patrick directly in two instances (q.78 and q.80). This episode concludes *A Oisín...* and it exhibits a 'triple *dúnadh*.' The first *dúnadh* appears in q.79, before a list of named individuals. The second and third instances occur at the end in qq.87 and 88. Any of these three quatrains makes a suitable ending to the ballad but since the device of a 'multiple *dúnadh*' is present in other ballads it may be regarded as an artistic device rather than evidence for accretion of new quatrains. Irish versions of *Mór anocht mo chumha*

<sup>7</sup> For a Scottish example, see *ibid*. At this moment, I have only one Irish version of *Conn mac an Deirg* available for comparison; since this ballad has 41qq. in all versions listed in the RIA and BM catalogues and is not a very common text, I suspect that there is a great deal of uniformity in the extant versions. Matters are further complicated by the strong possibility that *Conn mac an Deirg* is directly derived from the ballad of the *Dearg* but this cannot be discussed here.



*féin* exhibit a 'double *dúnadh*' and the BDL version of *Laoidh Fhraoich* even has a 'quadruple *dúnadh*' which is highlighted in the original text.<sup>8</sup> Another feature which deserves to be mentioned is the appearance in q.84 of a certain Forlámh mac Fir Chuirb as a victim of Cairbre's. This turns at least one pseudo-historical account of the battle of Gabhair on its head as the account given in the older *Agallamh* names Orlámh as Cairbre's slayer; Fear Corb is mentioned as the father of Cairbre's slayer Semeon/Semioth by the Annals of the Four Masters, O'Flaherty, Keating, and the Annals of Ulster. Some imperfect memory of at least one other source connected with the battle of Gabhair appears to underlie this appearance of Forlámh; the presence of the king of Ulster and the son of the king of Lochlann in subordinate roles may well point in the same direction.<sup>9</sup>

In the area of overlap there is a numbering-quatrain in both ballads which expresses the same idea.

*A Oisín... q.79*  
*Go riamtar gainneamh mara*  
*Ar áon agus réltana*  
*Ní haireamhtar trían a ttrín*  
*Ar marb Osgar mac Oisín.*

*Innis duinn... Ó Siochfhradha q.64*  
*Go náirmhthear féar faithche*  
*Is léar-ghaineamh tráighe*  
*Ar thuit le mo mhacsa*  
*Ní fhéadtar a n-áireamh.*

The shared image of counting grains of sand to get the number of those killed by Osgar may well be significant as evidence for derivation and adaptation of this quatrain from either *Innis dúinn...* or *A Oisín...* but it is also possible that these quatrains represent further examples of 'floating images.' Other instances of overlap in this episode are the mention of the king of Ulster's death by Oisín (*Innis duinn...* q.64 and *A Oisín...* q.82) and of the king of Leinster's death by Osgar in *A Oisín...* in q.83 and by Caoilte in *Innis duinn...* in q.66.

Two quatrains of dialogue between Patrick and Oisín in *Innis dúinn...* lead to the concluding dialogue beginning *Innis dom a Phádraig*.

While the above discussion singles out possible evidence for contact between the two ballads this evidence does not point unequivocally in one direction; *A Oisín...* might be an improved re-working in a different metre of *Innis dúinn...* or *Innis dúinn...* might be an inferior ballad based loosely on *A Oisín...*. The DF version of *A Oisín...* is the only one that appears to be extant while the earliest version available to

<sup>8</sup> Meek, *HC* pp.396-377.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 4 , section a: The *Cath Gabhra* Texts and History.

me of *Innis dúinn...* dates only to the early eighteenth century,<sup>10</sup> and is not substantially different from later ones. The absence of texts from a given period cannot be used as an argument for the non-existence of versions of a ballad. All I am prepared to concede at this point is that the shared features of the ballad are probably not the result of coincidence but at present I am not able to unravel the mechanisms that were at work. The apparent influence of other *Cath Gabhra* sources at least in *A Oisín...* further complicates matters.

Of the two ballads, I regard *A Oisín...* as the more satisfactory one. Its plot is more complete and coherent than that of *Innis dúinn...* although there are some points to criticise in its structure. The initial dialogue and the various lists are rather ponderous; the king of Ulster and the son of the king of Lochlann are non-essential characters that are introduced in a way that does nothing to further the plot, indeed, theirs are redundant roles which are more likely to obscure the plot. Although the original author appears to have had some knowledge of the pseudo-historical background to the battle of Gabhair there are some inconsistencies like Fionn's pilgrimage and the puzzling appearance of Forlámh.

## **Section b: *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne, Innis dúinn a Oisín, and Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis***

The ancillary text beginning *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne* precedes O'Kearney's version of the core text *Innis dúinn a Oisín* in *TOS*;<sup>11</sup> the title of this composite text of 180 quatrains in total runs: *Tuarusgabhail Chatha Gabhra, maille re h-Oisín Mac Fhinn, do Phatraic*. The nineteenth century manuscript RIA 24 L 3, written by John O'Daly, has a text of 179 quatrains entitled *Tuarusgbháil Chatha Gabhra maille re hOisín mac Fhinn do Patraic* beginning *Truaigh liom a thulaich na Féinne* and 110 quatrains of *Tuarasgbháil Chatha Gabhra re Oisín do Phadraig* beginning *Truagh liom tulla na Feinne* appear in RIA 24 M 2, written by Standish Hayes O'Grady in 1851; the other scribes in the same manuscript include John O'Daly and probably Nicholas O'Kearney. All three scribes were leading figures in the Ossianic Society of Dublin<sup>12</sup> and while this does not necessarily mean that the three

<sup>10</sup> RIA 23 L 34, written by the Dublin scribe Maurice Newby between 1711-1715.

<sup>11</sup> *TOS* I; pp.68-71. This is very nearly identical to the text in RIA 23 M 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p.9.

manuscripts are connected, the similarity in title and length of the TOS version and RIA 24 L 3 may indicate that O'Daly's text is similar in structure to the TOS one.<sup>13</sup>

Three short texts of *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne* appear in RIA manuscripts; two have the title *Crusán(t)acht Thullaigh na Féine*, begin *Truagh liom a thullach na Féine*, and have eight quatrains. One text appears in RIA 23 O 35, written by the Galway scribe Brían Ó Fearragháil for Charles O'Connor of Belanagare in the eighteenth century while the other manuscript, RIA 23 Q 18, was written by Edward Hore between 1789(?) and 1818.<sup>14</sup> Along with what is likely to be the initial eight quatrains of O'Grady's RIA 24 M 2 text, they form the basis of Ó Siochfhradha's version<sup>15</sup>. There is little textual difference between TOS and Ó Siochfhradha where the quatrains appear in the same order and the main difference to RIA 23 Q 18 lies in its different order of quatrains (i.e. 1, 2, 7, 3, 5, 4, 6, 8).<sup>16</sup> Another short version of 7½ quatrains is found in RIA 23 M 8, dated c.1822-1823 and written by Seamus Ó Meara. This is entitled [ ] *Catha Gabhra idir P. 7 Oisín* but no *Cath Gabhra* core text seems to follow. While this development may be accidental - this is one of only two pages this scribe wrote in the manuscript - the overall indication appears to be that *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne* was current as a short ballad in its own right as well as in the form of introduction to the core text *Innis duinn a Oisín*. There is no obvious link within *Truagh liom...* to *Innis dúinn...* beyond mention of Osgar (TOS q.6d) since in *Truagh liom...* Oisín laments that Rath Cruachan is now under the control of St. Patrick and asserts that the clerics with their bells and crosiers would soon be driven out were his old companions alive. However, Oisín addresses Patrick in this piece and it is quite possible that this feature facilitated its assimilation to the initial dialogue setting involving Patrick and Oisín in *Innis dúinn...* It is notable that all three versions of *Truagh liom...* end with a *dúnadh* that extends to a repetition of the entire first line which suggests that the ballad originated as an independent text.

An independent version of 24 quatrains is extant in BDL X; no other Scottish version appears to survive. Seven quatrains of this text are represented in the Irish versions. In TOS they appear in the order BDL 1, 2, 3, 11, 14, 10, 13. TOS q.8 has no direct BDL equivalent but uses the same form of *dúnadh*.<sup>17</sup> The BDL version

<sup>13</sup> I have not studied either RIA 24 L 3 nor RIA 24 M 2 in any detail.

<sup>14</sup> The ballad sections in these two manuscripts appear to be very close according to the respective descriptions in the RIA catalogue where sequence, length of versions and their first lines and titles show considerable overlap.

<sup>15</sup> Ó Siochfhradha, *Laoithe na Féinne*; p.279 and p.317.

<sup>16</sup> I have not consulted the RIA 23 O 35 version.

<sup>17</sup> Meek, HC, discussion of BDL X, section iii, suggests a possible link between this quatrain and BDL X q.5.

precedes the dialogue ballad *Innis dúinn, a Phádraig* in the manuscript, probably reflecting the shared themes of both ballads. In the TOS compilation an Irish version of *Innis dúinn, a Phádraig* is found, although not directly following *Truagh liom...*<sup>18</sup>

Its independent character is further emphasised by the difference in metre between *Truagh liom...* and *Innis dúinn, a Oisín* or *Innis dúinn, a Phádraig*. The metre of *Truagh liom...* is fairly respectable *rannaigheacht bheag* and *Innis dúinn, a Phádraig* uses *rionnaird* with some degree of competence. The metre of *Innis dúinn, a Oisín* is less easy to determine. There is a high incidence of hexasyllabic lines and end rhyme takes place between lines b and d; this would point in the direction of *rionnaird* with its pattern of 6<sup>2</sup> 6<sup>2</sup> 6<sup>2</sup> 6<sup>2</sup> as in Ó Siochfhradha, q.11:

*Innis dom, a Oisín*  
*Dala tús do chomhráidh,*  
*Cá líon de mhacaibh ríogh*  
*Do bhí sibh san gcomhdháil.*

However, there is also a considerable number of heptasyllabic lines, again with disyllabic end rhyme between lines b and d, which would give us *rannaigheacht bheag*, as in Ó Siochfhradha, q.17:

*Do bhí Oscar mac Garraidh*  
*Is deich gcéad curadh cliste*  
*Ag comóradh an chatha*  
*I n-aghaidh éacht mo mhic-se.*<sup>19</sup>

The matter is further complicated by quatrains which mix hexa- and heptasyllabic rhymes in what appears to be a random order; in any case I do not know of any metre using permutations of a 7<sup>2</sup> 6<sup>2</sup> scheme.<sup>20</sup> Ó Siochfhradha's q.65 illustrates this:

<i>Is liom-sa thuit rí Uladh,</i>	7 <sup>2</sup>
<i>Gérbh ionnsaighe calma;</i>	6 <sup>2</sup>
<i>Is mór an díth daoine</i>	6 <sup>2</sup>
<i>Ar claidheadh ar mhaigh Ghabhra.</i>	7 <sup>2</sup>

<sup>18</sup> O'Kearney pp.92-110. See also Meek, *HC*, discussion of BDL XI, section iii.

<sup>19</sup> The last line is one of Ó Siochfhradha's variant readings in footnote 4 on p.201.

<sup>20</sup> Murphy: *Early Irish Metrics* has nothing of this type.

There are many instances of hypermetric and hypometric lines, particularly in manuscript versions. Generally, there is not much poetic embellishment such as alliteration, consonance or internal rhyme. The pattern of end-rhyme is not used entirely consistently; in some cases rhyme is completely absent (e.g. Ó Siochfhradha q.4 *i gcomhrac* - *Diarmaid*) while in other instances imperfect rhymes are used (e.g. Ó Siochfhradha q.60 *shíoda* - *tíre*). Even for an *ogláchas* poem *Innis dúinn a Oisín* is at best an adequate effort which concentrates more on the narrative than the poetic aspect.

There appears to be a slightly higher amount of *rionnaird*-type quatrains in the ballad than of *rannaigheacht bheag*-type quatrains. At the present time, I am inclined to suggest that the present form of the ballad is close to that in which it was composed originally. *Innis dúinn a Oisín* does not have the feel of a text which moved from *rionnaird* - a relatively rare metre for ballads - towards the more common *rannaigheacht bheag* during the course of transmission because the relative paucity of artistic devices is noticeable in both metres. It is perhaps possible to see this as evidence for late composition in a post-bardic or non-bardic context, along with the deficiencies in plot outlined above.

### **Links between *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis***

A direct link is evident between *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and BDL XXI, *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*.<sup>21</sup> While the main discussion of BDL XXI is best conducted below<sup>22</sup> it is necessary to point out the shared features of both ballads here. Both use *rionnaird* but the metre is more competently handled in BDL XXI. Both represent an account of the battle of Gabhair in dialogue form but where BDL XXI has Fionn and his son Fearghus as dialogue partners, *Innis dúinn a Oisín* has Patrick and Oisín. There is little direct textual correspondence with the exception of BDL q.1 which is represented with some changes by Ó Siochfhradha q.9; other than that there are some shared lines, usually with some change present; e.g. BDL q.3b and Ó Siochfhradha q.14a, q.4d. and q.42a, q.5a and q.43a, q.8b and q.44c.

It is clear that extensive reworking has taken place to arrive at *Innis dúinn a Oisín* from the starting point of BDL XXI which basically falls into two episodes.

<sup>21</sup> The BDL poem is well attested in later Scottish tradition but appears to be very rare in Ireland. There is a reference to a version close to BDL XXI found in RIA 24 P 29 in Meek, HC, discussion of BDL XXI, section vi, but I have not consulted this manuscript.

<sup>22</sup> See chapter 6, section b: *Innis dúinne a Fhearghuis*.



Fionn's request for an account of the battle of Gabhair is answered by Fearghus with a list of the slain (qq.1-5). This is followed by another question by Fionn regarding Osgar's deeds (q.6); Fearghus answers with a short praise passage (qq.7-9) before relating the outcome of the combat between Osgar and Cairbre and then Cairbre's son Art (qq.10-13). Fearghus identifies himself in the final quatrain.

By contrast, *Innis dúinn a Oisín* has several extended lists of heroes, particularly battle fatalities; in addition, the Osgar vs. Caireall and Osgar vs. mac Garaidh episodes are significant new developments which may have been inspired by other sources dealing with the battle of Gabhair. If it is reasonable to see *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis* and *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* as comparatively late compositions belonging originally to the second half of the 15th century or thereabouts<sup>23</sup> then this would lend added weight to my tentative post-bardic date for *Innis duinn a Oisín*.<sup>24</sup>

### Section c: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*

The final Irish core text has the usual title *Tuarasgabháil chatha Gabhra* and begins with the line *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*. The earliest extant version is the Scottish one found in BDL XXII and has a total of 55 quatrains, six of which are six-line units (qq.4, 24, 32, 33, 35, and 41). Six-line units appear in Irish versions as well (qq.10 and 17 in Ó Siochfhradha)<sup>25</sup> but these do not correspond to any of the BDL ones.<sup>26</sup> Ó Siochfhradha's composite version of 90 quatrains appears to be representative of a significant section of the surviving Irish versions; all examples in RIA and the British Museum date to the eighteenth or nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Of the seven RIA versions I have scrutinised closely, five are in close agreement with Ó Siochfhradha, namely RIA 3 B 9 (89 quatrains), F VI 2 (89 quatrains), 24 A 29 (89

<sup>23</sup> As suggested by Meek, *HC*, discussion of BDL XXII, section iii, summary of sub-section (2).

<sup>24</sup> For the relationship between *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and its ancillary texts see chapter 4, section c; sub-sections *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil*, and *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and *Innis dúinn a Phádraig*.

<sup>25</sup> Ó Siochfhradha: *Laoithe na Féinne*; pp.206-211.

<sup>26</sup> This is discussed in chapter 3. section b; sub-section: Complementary, compensatory, and elaborative innovation (complementary innovation). See also this chapter, section c, sub-section: General textual differences.

<sup>27</sup> Ó Siochfhradha's sources include the following RIA manuscripts: 24 B 29 (87 quatrains), 23 A 14 (146½ quatrains, presumably incorporating other material as well), 23 D 30 (c.84 quatrains), 24 B 17 (83½ quatrains), and 23 L 24 (84 quatrains). These versions I have not investigated in detail. Two more source manuscripts cited by Ó Siochfhradha, RIA 23 O 35 and 24 P 7, do not contain versions of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* according to the RIA catalogue.



quatrains), 24 L 7 (79 quatrains although internal evidence indicates that this is derived from a version of c.89 quatrains), and 24 A 17 (88 quatrains). The following table shows that there is a cluster of versions some of which are quite likely to be related on the above evidence. Italics denote versions that are certain to fall into this category.

80qq. RIA 23 N 15, 24 P 41, BM Eg.106, Eg.133, Eg.211 and Add.11215	6
83qq. RIA 23 O 32, G VI 1, BM Eg.138, Eg.140	4
84qq. RIA 23 C 30, <i>24 B 17</i> , 23 E 9, <i>23 D 30</i> , <i>23 L 24</i>	5
85qq. RIA 23 L 14, 23 L 35	2
87qq. RIA 24 C 56, 23 D 25, <i>24 B 29</i>	3
88qq. RIA 24 B 16, <i>24 A 17</i>	2
89qq. RIA <i>24 A 21</i> , 23 G 23, <i>F VI 2</i> , 24 C 15, <i>3 B 9</i> , ( <i>24 L 7</i> )	6
91qq. RIA E VI 2	1
	total 29

To these 29 versions we may add Ó Siochfhradha's source 23 A 14. Only c.12 versions of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* which are longer or shorter than the versions in this cluster remain in the holdings of RIA and BM respectively; of these, 23 C 26 and 23 M 2 contain versions of *Mór anocht...* that are distinct from the above type and from each other. Of the remaining versions I have not consulted any in sufficient detail to come to firm conclusions.

### General textual differences

RIA 23 M 2, a nineteenth century manuscript written by Nicholas O'Kearney, contains the compilation of several *Cath Gabhra* ballads which is printed in TOS I, albeit with minor differences. The version of *Mór anocht...* which concludes this compilation has 62 quatrains and differs considerably from the 'standard' type found in Ireland but appears to have links to BDL XXII, although a less obvious connection to other Irish versions of the Ó Siochfhradha type is also apparent.

Detailed comparison of the two texts shows that all episodes present in BDL also occur in TOS; two episodes - the dialogue between Caoilte and Osgar (qq.30, 31, 32cd, and 33) and the description of Fionn's arrival on the battlefield (qq.40cd, 41, and 42) - have been extended and at the end of the text two more episodes have been added. These accretions fall into two categories. The first of these can be defined as either new composition or accretion from unidentified sources as in TOS

qq.31ab, and 32cd (the dialogue) or qq. 40cd, 41ab and 42bcd (Fionn's arrival). I am inclined to regard these lines as new composition because in two instances (qq.32cd and 40cd) they complement the equivalents of two of the BDL six-line units (32 and 41) to form quatrains; neither of these new couplets, however, is an improvement to the quality of the lines they supplement or the plot of the ballad. The extension to TOS qq.28 and 32ab (BDL q.32), for instance, diminishes the effect of Caoilte's fainting after examining Osgar's wounds: *Buailios fó lán a chorp cáin/ Tarngas a fholt 's ár lámhaibh*. TOS q.40cd, complementing the equivalent of BDL 41, which tells of the gathering of the survivors of the *Fian* after the battle, is even less appropriate: *Ba bhinn seabrannach ár sleagh/ Agas meadhair na míleadh*. Whether these and the other examples of elaborative innovation are to be attributed to O'Kearney or whether they go further back than the TOS compilation I am not able to determine.

Accretions from identifiable sources, namely a version of *Mór anocht...* of the Ó Siochfhradha type, form the second category. In the Caoilte-Osgar dialogue, Caoilte reminds Osgar of the healing of his wounds after an unspecified adventure at the Sith of Druim Cliabh (q.30). This is very likely to be a reworking of a quatrain like S. q.52, in the Fionn-Osgar dialogue, where Fionn claims that Osgar's wounds were worse after the battle of Binn Éadair and yet he was healed. The parallels continue in q.31. The first couplet appears to be new but line c is strongly reminiscent of S. q.37c while d corresponds to S. q.54d.<sup>28</sup> Q.33 corresponds to S. q.74, a quatrain that has been moved to the dialogue from the episode telling of events immediately after Osgar's death; this quatrain is absent in RIA 23 M 2. In the episode of Fionn's arrival, qq.41 and 42 also display a combination of probable new composition and borrowing from the Ó Siochfhradha type. Qq.41ab and 42bcd are new lines; qq.41cd and 42a, however, are taken from the same episode in S. q.47abc. Finally, the conclusion of the TOS ballad, qq.59-62, is clearly based on the corresponding episodes of the Ó Siochfhradha type (qq.84-88); here, S. qq.86, 87ab88ab, 88cd89ab and 90 are represented while the remaining quatrains or couplets of the Ó Siochfhradha type do not appear. In this section, Osgar mac Garaidh and Osgar the son of the king of Lochlann are introduced in a rather incongruous way since they belong to the plot of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and do not appear in *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*. These accretions and their combination with apparent new composition, seem to indicate intention rather than coincidence or

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<sup>28</sup> Particularly in the reading of the manuscript version in RIA 23 M 2: *Idir m' órain is m' imlinn*.

reciter's errors. However, at this stage I am not certain whether O'Kearney or some other individual is responsible for this particular set of differences.

There are other differences between this text and BDL which are most likely to be coincidental but perhaps not entirely unintentional in a number of cases. These could have happened at any stage of transmission in a scribal or in an oral context. Loss of quatrains or couplets can be observed in the absence in TOS of BDL qq.3, 11, 12cd, 30, 33ab, 34, and 48cd. None of these are essential for the understanding of the plot. The loss of BDL q.12cd is easily explained as a measure to achieve quatrains in a sequence that contains a six-line unit, BDL 4; this is the couplet that would be left over on its own according to the quatrain division in TOS in which BDL 4abcd equals q.3 with a subsequent shift of lines by a couplet following BDL q.4ef (= TOS q.4ab) etc. until the beginning of the Patrick Oisín dialogue where the text resumes the BDL quatrain division.<sup>29</sup>

The episode telling of the losses of fighting power and tributes of the *Fian* after the battle of Gabhair (BDL qq.9-12) has undergone some reordering along with the loss of BDL qq.11 and 12cd with the new order BDL q.9ab, 9cd12ab, 10 (= TOS qq.8cd-10: there is an awkward episode break in the middle of q.8).

BDL qq.30 and 33ab belong to an episode which contains a significant amount of accretions as shown above; in addition to the acquisition of new material, the remainder of the BDL quatrains and couplets have undergone partial rearranging so that the order of quatrains in TOS (qq.28-34) is BDL qq.32abcd, 31, two new quatrains, 32ef + new couplet, new quatrain, 33cdef. The six-line unit BDL q.32 has turned into two quatrains by adding a couplet.

The same technique has been applied to the six-line unit BDL 41 which appears in TOS in the following order: TOS q.39 = BDL 41abcd, TOS q.40 = BDL 41ef + new couplet. This is an example of complementary innovation. Another method for reducing a six-line unit to a quatrain occurs in TOS q.22 which is a conflation of BDL 24.

An example of reordering of quatrains appears in the Patrick-Oisín dialogue where the TOS episode (qq.11-14) has the order BDL qq.13, 15, 14, 16; since the new ordering appears within Oisín's part of the dialogue the logic of the episode is not affected.

In some quatrains the BDL order of the first couplet has been reversed. This can be classed as accidental in the *deibhidhe*-based metre with end-rhyme in couplets since the rhyme pattern is preserved. Examples are TOS q.17 = BDL q.19bacd, TOS

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<sup>29</sup> It appears that Ross' edition of the BDL ballad to a large extent follows the layout of quatrains in TOS.

q.20 = BDL q.22bacd, and TOS q.49 = BDL q.51bacd; in this last instance there is also a reversal of order of quatrains from BDL qq.51 and 50 to TOS qq.49 and 50.

The changes outlined above have taken place *within* episodes; there are also several instances where quatrains or couplets have been transposed from their original episode to a different one. All of the transposed items fit into their new environment without impairing the flow or the sense of the ballad but there are no indications whether transposition was deliberate or coincidental. BDL 35, a six-line unit, is the first instance of transposition as it has shifted from the episode in which the survivors gather around Osgar to the beginning of the episode which enumerates the dead on both sides (BDL qq.52-52) and forms TOS qq.53 and 54ab. This results in different quatrain divisions from TOS q.54 to q.57 which achieves a return to the quatrain division of BDL by incorporating BDL q.48ab from the dialogue between Fionn and Osgar as its final couplet.

The episode telling of the *Fian's* burying of the dead and mourning of Osgar's impending death (BDL qq.38-39) has been split up and distributed to two different episodes. BDL q.38 now precedes the previous episode in which the *Fian* gather to bear Osgar away (TOS q.35); line b has adapted from BDL [a]g *íodhlacadh churp go lá* to TOS *ag coimhead a chuirp go lá*, thus continuing the focus of the previous episode, the Caoilte-Osgar dialogue, on Osgar. BDL q.39 is found as TOS q.51, following the quatrain in which Fionn weeps for Osgar; again, a slight change to the quatrain continues the focus on Fionn, the protagonist of the previous quatrain. TOS q.51 is then followed by a quatrain displaced from the Fionn-Osgar dialogue (BDL q.47) in which Fionn refers to the curse of Art Aoinfhear having resulted in Osgar's death.

Despite the changes that have occurred in development from the BDL-type to the version represented by TOS it is clear that TOS has more in common with BDL than it has with either the Ó Siochfhradha type or Tomás Ó Súilleabháin's version in RIA 23 C 26.<sup>30</sup>

### Differences to BDL

The type represented by Ó Siochfhradha's version is a strand of the Irish tradition which differs considerably from BDL. Much BDL material appears in this type either verbatim or with changes that still allow recognition of the BDL equivalent; the only BDL quatrains not represented are qq.11, 33ab (thus reducing a

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the relationship of the different Irish types, see this chapter, section d: Textual Relationships of Irish Core Texts.



six-line unit to a quatrain), 34, and 44. Most of the differences to BDL appear to have been introduced deliberately. On a small scale, the regularisation of BDL's six-line units is notable, as in the case of BDL 33 above. Extension into two quatrains by adding a new couplet at the end was the means of regularisation in the case of BDL 4 > S. qq.4 and 5, BDL 24 > S. qq.28 and 29, BDL 35 > S. qq.79 and 80, and BDL 41 > S. qq.45 and 46. In the case of BDL 32 (= S. qq.40 and 75ab) the third couplet has been dissociated from the preceding quatrain and moved from the dialogue between Caoilte and Osgar to the episode describing the immediate aftermath of Osgar's death; as with the other six-line units, this couplet has acquired a new couplet to form a quatrain. Conversely, BDL q.16 has been expanded into a six-line unit (S. q.10) by inserting a new couplet between ab and cd; at the same time, this unit has been transposed from its original position within the Patrick-Oisín dialogue to a position immediately preceding it. S. q.17, another six-line unit, appears to be part of the newly composed material in an extended episode. All these are instances of complementary innovation.

A more conspicuous set of developments is present in the expansion of existing episodes or the addition of new ones. BDL has no equivalent for the episode of Fionn's monologue detailing his losses (S. qq.64-70), Patrick's interjection (S. q.71), the burial of Osgar and other prominent heroes (S. qq.86-89), and Oisín's final prayer (S. q.90). The first of the extended episodes is the second Patrick-Oisín dialogue in which Patrick asks about Osgar's valour in the battle of Gabhair (BDL qq.17-18). One of Patrick's original two quatrains, BDL q.17, has been moved to the first Patrick-Oisín dialogue to become S. q.11. Three new quatrains, one put into the mouth of Patrick and two spoken by Oisín, have been prefixed to S. q.22, the equivalent of BDL q.18, in which the theme of Osgar's valour is further explored.

The next extended episode is the dialogue between Caoilte and Osgar (BDL qq.30-33); here, three quatrains have been inserted between Caoilte's addressing Osgar and the description of Osgar's wounds. In the first of these, Caoilte continues his speech to Osgar while in the remaining two quatrains Osgar replies by emphasising the importance of Cairbre's spear in inflicting the fatal wound.

S. q.47 extends the episode of Fionn's arrival (BDL qq.40-43) and portrays him searching for the bodies of Oisín and Osgar.

The dialogue between Fionn and Osgar (BDL qq.44-49) contains another extension of three quatrains (S. qq.52-54) in which Fionn compares Osgar's wounds to those he sustained in the battle of Binn Éadair; Osgar's replies that this time his wounds are fatal. BDL q.48, near the end of this episode, has become the beginning of a new long sequence (S. qq.57-70, or 71 if we include Patrick's interjection) in

which Fionn enumerates the tributes and privileges the *Fian* enjoyed before the battle of Gabhair. Still in the same episode, Osgar's death (BDL q.49, S. q.72) is now followed by two quatrains describing the gathering of the survivors to look at Osgar's wounds.

Most of the quatrains introduced in this way extend dialogue episodes while the rest extend descriptive passages. Fionn's long monologue (S. qq.55-70) straddles episodes and belongs both to the dialogue and the descriptive category. It is obvious that the developments that have led to the incorporation of new episodes and the extension of existing ones are to be classed as elaborative innovation; therefore, they are likely to be deliberate.

Finally, there is the problem of quatrains transposed from their original episode to a different one. The first instance of this occurs in the case of BDL q.2, a quatrain that gives a brief characterisation of Cairbre. In all Irish versions I consulted, this quatrain (S. q.3) introduces the episode detailing Cairbre's enmity (S. qq.3-10). This quatrain fits quite satisfactorily into the context provided by either position.

BDL qq.9-12, forming an episode contrasting the situation of the *Fian* before and after the battle of Gabhair, have been incorporated into Oisín's part of the first Patrick-Oisín dialogue: BDL qq.9, 10, and 12 appear as S. qq.18, 15, and 16 while BDL q. 11 has dropped out altogether. Again, this shift places the quatrains into a plausible and logical context.

BDL qq.16 and 17, forming the end of the first Patrick-Oisín dialogue and the beginning of the second, have been moved to precede and initiate the first Patrick-Oisín dialogue in S. qq.10abef and 11. This transposition is only partially successful because S. 10, telling how Mac Con's son was sent for to take the kingship of Ireland, follows directly on Cairbre's incitement to battle and the decision to begin hostilities. This quatrain works better as part of an episode dealing with the consequences of the battle. Patrick's quatrain, on the other hand, is appropriate in either of the two Patrick-Oisín dialogues.

An example of transposition within an episode is found in the passage in which Oisín finds the wounded Osgar (BDL qq.24-29). Here, BDL q.24, describing how Oisín puts down his spear and sits down next to his son, has been moved from the moment when Oisín finds Osgar to a position after the quatrain in which Osgar addresses his father (S. q.32). The quatrain is just as effective in its new position.

The six-line unit BDL 35, extended into S. qq.79 and 80, has not inappropriately been taken from its original context of the gathering of survivors



around the wounded Osgar (BDL qq.34-37) to the mourning of the *Fian* after Osgar's death (S. qq.77-80).

The BDL episode following the gathering, telling of the burial of the dead and the mourning for Osgar (BDL qq.38-39), has been split up and distributed to two different episodes. BDL q. 38 appears as S. q.81, in a section describing the burial and containing a list of numbers of the casualties of the battle (S. qq.81-83). BDL q.39 is found as S. q.78, part of the episode in which the survivors mourn Osgar. In the case of these two quatrains, their transposition to a new context actually makes an improvement to the ballad.

A considerable proportion of the above transpositions involve similar contexts. This might be taken to indicate that the shifting of quatrains was accidental but since almost all instances of this give results which are as satisfactory as, or even better than, the original BDL context I am inclined to believe that these developments were introduced deliberately, perhaps even in a bardic context.

Generally, the differences that set the Irish versions of *Mór anocht...* apart from BDL appear to be predominantly the result of conscious and deliberate and, on the whole, skilful remodelling although we cannot entirely rule out a subordinate stratum of changes introduced initially by coincidence. I am not, however, able to determine when these developments took place or who introduced them.

## **Section d: Textual Relationships of Irish Core Texts**

The previous section has set out the relationships that exist between core texts and ancillary texts and investigated the potential connections between the Irish core texts *A Oisín cía in feart dona*, *Innis dúinn a Oisín* and *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*, giving particular attention to the last-mentioned text because of the significance of the version contained in BDL. It now remains to compare the evidence of the Irish core texts that survive in multiple versions; i.e. *Mór anocht...* and *Innis dúinn...* in order to establish patterns of interrelationship where possible.

### **Versions of *Mór anocht mo chumha fein***

Forty versions of this very popular ballad are extant in the holdings of the British Museum and the Royal Irish Academy, not counting those that likely to be part of the TOS-style compilation beginning *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne*. To these

can be added the composite version prepared by Ó Siochfhradha (S.) which draws predominantly on RIA sources. These texts span the time from c. 1715 (BM manuscript Eg.106) to c. 1860 (RIA 23 O 71) but it has to be emphasised that the existence of earlier texts is highly probable, thus allowing sufficient time for different Irish types to develop, presumably from a model resembling BDL.<sup>31</sup> However, in the absence of any evidence, the time-scale of developments cannot be determined.

I have investigated the following texts in detail: S., which I have used as a 'standard' version since it is the longest of my texts (90 quatrains); Nicholas O'Kearney's version printed in *TOS* (62 quatrains); RIA 3 B 9 (89 quatrains), written between 1810 and 1814 by Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin; RIA F VI 2 (89 quatrains), written by the same scribe in 1813; RIA 24 A 17 (88 quatrains), written by Peattair Ó Longáin in 1821; RIA 24 A 21 (89 quatrains), written by Tadhg Mha Cártha between 1821 and 1822; RIA 24 L 7 (79 quatrains), written by Laurence Hanly between 1797 and 1801; and RIA 23 C 26 (71 quatrains), written between 1770 and 1771 by Thomás Ó Súilleamháin. Of these eight texts, only the unpublished ones RIA 3 B 9, 24 L 7, and 23 C 26 are given in the appendix since the three Ó Longáin manuscripts are close to each other. Similarly, 24 A 21 does not differ significantly from the Ó Longáin type.

These texts fall into three distinct groups. The most important of these is represented by S., 3 B 9, F VI 2, 24 A 17, 24 A 21, and 24 L 7 and will be called the S. type. There is a strong possibility that a large part of the extant texts belongs to this type.<sup>32</sup> A BDL-derived strand of tradition is represented by *TOS*, and 23 C 26 differs in both structure and detail from the other types.

### The S.-type and its relatives

The most complete version, S., contains one feature which is not paralleled by any other Irish version I investigated with the exception of *TOS*.<sup>33</sup> This is q.75, in the episode telling of Osgar's death and the mourning of the *Fian*, describing how Caoilte faints. The *TOS* parallel to this is q.32 in the Caoilte-Osgar dialogue which provides a more appropriate environment than the S. context. Although Ó Siochfhradha was

<sup>31</sup> For the relationship between S. and BDL or *TOS* and BDL see this chapter, section c: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

<sup>32</sup> See this chapter, section c: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

<sup>33</sup> To this could be added a version printed in: Ó Siochfhradha (ed.): *Filíocht Fiannaíochta*; Dublin/Cork 1954 (new edition); pp.58-65. This is an abbreviated version clearly based on S. edited for the use of schools.

familiar with the TOS version<sup>34</sup> he does not quote it explicitly as one of the sources of his printed version. The difference in positioning of the quatrain rules out the possibility that it came directly from TOS and we have to assume that it came from another of Ó Siochfhradha's sources, whether specified or unspecified.

The two manuscripts by Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin, RIA 3 B 9 and F VI 2, do not have many distinguishing features. In 3 B 9, the second couplets of qq.69 and 70 have been swapped, resulting in the order 69ab70cd, 70ab69cd as compared with F VI 2 or any of the other versions which contain these quatrains.<sup>35</sup> I am inclined to interpret this as a scribal error. Of potentially greater significance are the titles of the text in the two manuscripts. 3 B 9 has *Tuarasgabhail Chatha Gabhra le Oisín mac Finn a bhfiaghnuisi Phádrúicc*. In F VI 2 the title appears as *Aig seo an duain deaghnach do rin Oisín mac Fínn a bhfiaghnuisi Phádraig mar a ttugann tuarasgabháil chatha Gabhra dho ionnar thuit a mhac Osgar. Tugadh an cath so A.D. 285*. This gives background information regarding the supposed circumstances of composition of the ballad, its subject matter, and the date of the battle. The end of the ballad is treated differently in the two manuscripts, too; 3 B 9 simply has *finit* after the final line while F VI 2 repeats the first line, drawing attention to the *dúnadh*. Both manuscripts follow contemporary scribal conventions regarding the end of a text. There is some variation in orthography and the scribal abbreviations of the two texts. More significant, however, are the occasional differences in wording that occur as the following table demonstrates:

quatrain	3 B 9	F VI 2
12b	<i>Chuguibh a Neirinn <u>fhiorghloin</u></i>	<i>Chuguibh go hÉireann <u>íobhruig</u></i>
20d	<i>Fear do bfearr gaisge 7 <u>misneach</u></i>	<i>Neach do bfearr <u>eagnamh is oineach</u></i>
28d	<i>7 a <u>chlóidhiomh</u> ionna dheaslaimh</i>	<i>Is a <u>lann</u> ionna dheasláimh</i>
29b	<i>Tar <u>bealuibh</u> a luithríghe</i>	<i>Do <u>chrannaibh</u> a lúithridhe</i>
39d	<i>Do chuaidh a ccreacht na <u>géirshleigh</u></i>	<i>Do chuaidh a ccreacht na <u>sleidhe</u></i>
40d	<i>Iar na ghearadh don <u>mhóirshleidh</u></i>	<i>Iar na ghearadh do <u>gheirshleidhe</u></i>
42a	<i>Tógbhamáoid na tOsgar <u>feardha</u></i>	<i>Tógbhamaoid an tOsgar <u>amhra</u></i>
42b	<i>Air chrannaibh ár sleagh <u>anáirde</u></i>	<i>Air chrannaibh ár shleagh a <u>ccáirde</u></i>
51a	<i>Truagh sin a Osgair <u>feardha fhéil</u></i>	<i>Truagh sin a Osgair <u>fhéil</u></i>
53a	<i>Mo leigheas ní bhfuil a <u>bhfaith</u></i>	<i>Mo leighios ní bhfuil an <u>dán</u></i>
53b	<i>Is ní <u>dióngantar</u> lá an bhráth</i>	<i>Is ní <u>déantar</u> go lá an bhráth</i>

<sup>34</sup> Ó Siochfhradha, *Laoithe na Féinne*, p.314.

<sup>35</sup> This only excludes 23 C 26 which has lost S. q.69ab and 70cd and gives S. q.70ab69cd as its q.71. The apparent overlap with 3 B 9 is probably due to coincidence.

80d Air tulchaibh áille aoibhinne

Air tulchuibh árda aoibhinn

81b Air na chómháiriomh dFionn féin

Iar na náiriomh le Fionn féin

82d Do shluagh Éireann armghlaine

Do shluagh Éirean airmghile

The majority of the above differences involve material which belongs to the Heroic Code and the substitution of words does not affect the rhyme or the metre. The omission of *feardha* in F VI 2 q.51a is probably a scribal error.

All this poses the question whether Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin was using the same exemplar for both manuscripts and if so how the differences can be explained. Although the two manuscripts have a certain amount of shared material according to the RIA catalogue there is no indication that there is a closer connection between them. The third Ó Longáin manuscript, which shares texts with the other two but is not a copy of either, sheds some further light on the situation.

This, RIA 24 A 17, was written by Peattair Ó Longáin in collaboration with his father Mícheál Óg in 1821;<sup>36</sup> the text in question is in Peattair's hand. This version has lost S. q.56, part of Fionn's monologue, and as this quatrain is part of a sequence of three quatrains all beginning *slán (uaim)* in the majority of lines this loss is likely to be a scribal error. More interesting is the regularisation of the six-line units 10 and 17. S. 10ef forms the first couplet of q.11, with S. q.11cd as its second couplet; S. q.11ab had dropped out altogether. Since S. q.11 is the beginning of the first Patrick-Oisín dialogue the result of this conflation is slightly awkward and it might be no more than a mistake. S.17 has simply lost its third couplet and become a quatrain. Comparison with the two manuscripts by Mícheál Óg reveals similarities to both. Looking at the above table of differences, we find that 24 A 17 agrees with 3 B 9 in the case of lines 12b, 29b, 42ab, 51a, 53ab, 80d, and 81b. The F VI 2 version is represented by lines 20d, 28d, 39d, 40d, and 82d. 24 A 17 q. 68cd runs *Dár thuillios mallocht mo rígh/ Tug mo ghlaintsliocht air neimhchrích* while the corresponding couplet in 3 B 9 q.70cd has *Dár thuillios fearg mo rígh/ Is tug mo ghlaintsliocht air neimhnídh*.

The differences in the three Ó Longáin manuscripts indicate that the scribes had more than one version of the ballad and that these versions were obviously very closely related. However, at this point it is not possible to determine whether we are to envisage these versions as actual written texts or whether there was a certain amount of oral input as well. It has been shown already that the copying of

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<sup>36</sup> Peadar Ó Longáin was born before 1802 according to information contained in B. Ó Conchúir: 'Measgra' in: *Éigse* 20 (1984); p.229. The same source gives Mícheál Óg's dates of birth and death as 1766 and 1837 respectively.

manuscripts was not a task performed in isolation and that exchange and discussion, and recitation as well, of material contained in the manuscripts was part of the scribal culture as well.<sup>37</sup> The scribes were thus aware of each other's versions and could make changes to their own versions if they so wished, much in the same way as any creative tradition bearer could make alterations to his or her material. It may even be possible that a certain amount of variation, particularly variation involving stock phrases and near-synonyms, was considered normal by the scribes, thus acknowledging a certain 'legitimate' variability in their material. Some degree of coincidence may have played a role here as well.

RIA 24 A 21, written by Tadhg Mha Cárrtha in 1821-1822, appears to confirm the above hypothesis. This text agrees largely with Peattair Ó Longáin's but has a few variations of its own. The regularisation of the six-line units has been achieved by different means: S. 10ef appears as q. 11cd, preceded by a new couplet not paralleled in any other version I have studied. S. 17 has been split up into a quatrain and a couplet (qq.18 and 19).<sup>38</sup> Two quatrains which are not essential to the plot have been lost altogether; these are the equivalents to S. qq.27 and 65cd66ab, the loss of the latter resulting in q.66 made up of S. q.65ab and q.66cd. Since S. qq.65cd and 66cd are almost identical except for the end-rhyme, this is quite clearly a scribal error. On the level of changes in formulaic material q.9b has *Gion go mbeidis air aon ríán* compared to 3 B 9 *Gion go mbeidis ar aoinghliadh*. In q.42c there is the hypermetric line *Sgairrfead a chatha le Fionn croga* where 3 B 9 has *Sgarfuid a chatha le Fionn*; neither line is entirely satisfactory. The rhyming word in d is *Móirne/Mórna* which roughly rhymes with *croga* (for *crodha*) of the hypermetric line but not with *Fionn* of 3 B 9 and other versions. The third example for small-scale variation appears in q.83ab *Ni raibh Fionn soilbhir na sámh/ Ón lá san go lá a bháis* where 3 B 9 has *Ni raibh Fionn soilbhir na slán/ Ón ló sin go hoidhche a bháis*.

Since all three scribes of the above manuscripts were associated with co. Cork it seems reasonable to conclude that these closely related versions of the ballad constitute examples of a Cork ecotype that enjoyed considerable popularity at least in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The evidence provided by S. allows this conclusion to be extended to include both a wider geographical spread and a

<sup>37</sup> See chapter 2, section b, sub-section: the Irish scribal tradition. There is also a reference to reading of manuscript material to an audience in Miss Brooke's writings in R.A. Breatnach: 'Two Eighteenth Century Irish Scholars: J.C. Walker and Charlotte Brooke' in: *Studia Hibernica* 5 (1965); p.94.

<sup>38</sup> The manuscript is not entirely clear as to quatrain division here. It is possible that the scribe intended a division after what I have interpreted as q.20ab, thus leaving q.20cd as a lone couplet before the second Patrick-Oisín dialogue.



longer period of time. The variants given in the footnotes to S. fall mostly into the same sort of category as outlined for the versions above; generally, S. appears to be closest to F VI 2 but shares features with the three other Cork texts as well. The sources of S., as far as they can be identified with certainty,<sup>39</sup> range from RIA 23 D 30, written between 1721 and 1722 by David Mullan in Dublin, to 23 A 14, written in the eighteenth or nineteenth century by Diarmuid Ó Lidhine. As regards provenance, the Cork connection is represented also by 24 B 29, written between 1785 and 1788 by Táidhg Ó Donnobháin; a Clare connection is established in 23 L 24, written between 1766 and 1769 by Diarmuid Ó Mulchaoine. It is not unlikely that S. and the related versions represent the most common type of *Mór anocht*... that is found in Ireland.

Another version of co. Clare provenance, written by Laurence Hanly between 1797 and 1801, is found in RIA 24 L 7 and further demonstrates the extent of small-scale variation which can be found while still clearly belonging to the S. type. While 24 L 7 shares features with all five versions discussed above it appears to be slightly closer to Peattair Ó Longáin's version than any of the others. There are, however, a number of differences which clearly set this version apart. The most striking feature is a greater amount of loss of material in this version than in any other of the S. type. The entire Osgar-Fionn dialogue is missing, along with the final quatrain of the preceding episode and the first quatrain of the following one (S. qq.49-56); this lacuna of eight quatrains, unacknowledged by the scribe, leaves a gap in the plot since Fionn's long monologue is now entirely unmotivated because the missing dialogue provides the connecting information. It is impossible to determine whether the scribe's exemplar was defective or whether this and other losses are the result of Hanly's own carelessness. One more quatrain, S. q.46, has dropped out of the text but this is not essential to the plot. More significant in my opinion is the loss of couplets which in a number of cases affects the quatrain structure of the ballad and is recognised by a number of couplets that stand on their own in my transcription of the text (qq.5, 29, 77, and 79) in order to present a structure parallel to other versions. The manuscript itself shows no indication of quatrain divisions, thus obscuring the problems posed by the loss of couplets. The regularisation of the six-line units 10 and 17 has been achieved by loss of their third couplets. There are no couplets corresponding to S. qq.5cd, 29cd, 87cd and 89cd and again it is not clear whether the scribe is to blame or his exemplar although Hanly's writing and spelling in general seem to be less careful than in the manuscripts discussed so far. The loss of q.29cd

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<sup>39</sup> See also this chapter, footnote 27.



has resulted in an interesting parallel to the BDL six-line unit 24 in qq.28 and 29ab although this seeming parallel to BDL may be no more than coincidence. A number of differences in Heroic Code material further removes this version from the rest as the table below shows:

quatrain	24 L 7	3 B 9
1d	<i>Tugamuirne is Cairibre <u>ceannchruadh</u></i>	<i>Do chuirsiom is Cairbre <u>cáomhchruaidh</u></i>
2c	<i>Go an cath sin Chairibre <u>chaomh</u> chruadh</i>	<i>Gus an ccaithsin Chairbre chruaidh</i>
26b	<i>7 bratach síodha <u>deaghshaor</u></i>	<i>Agas bratach síoda saor</i>
27c	<i>Ní rug sin ó <u>láithir</u> an chatha</i>	<i>Ní rugsam as an ccath</i>
27d	<i>Acht <u>sleadh</u> rígh nó <u>árdfhlaitha</u></i>	<i>Acht <u>fadhb</u> rígh no <u>rofhlaith</u></i>
37b	<i>Ná air crúadh <u>cath</u> sléaghadh ná clóidhimh</i>	<i>No ar cruaidh sleagh na clóidhiomh</i>
44a	<i>Seal fhada <u>air mbeadh</u> dhuinn mar sin</i>	<i>Seal fada dúinn mar sin</i>
51d	<i>Do mhac Cumhail lán mór</i>	<i>Do mhac Cúmhaill <u>lonn</u> lánmhór (60d)</i>
56d	<i>Do mhac Cumhail <u>arm ghloinne</u></i>	<i>Do mhac Cúmhaill <u>airmghéire</u> (65d)</i>
58d	<i>Gan cíos fá lán tróm <u>dóigfhir</u></i>	<i>Gan cíos fá lainn truim <u>Osgair</u> (67d)</i>
60a	<i>Bríathar do bhain <u>dIolluinn</u> mhic Con</i>	<i>Briathar do bhain <u>díom</u> Mac Con (69a)</i>
66d	<i>Ródh chlos fádh Eirinn <u>árdmhór</u></i>	<i>Budh clos fó Eírinn <u>aghfhuar</u> (75d)</i>
68b	<i>Níor a <u>bhraithir</u> bu dhéin</i>	<i>Níor <u>chaoín</u> a <u>charuid</u> budh déin (77b)</i>
68d	<i>7 cáich uile dá chaoine</i>	<i>Cách uile ag caoine <u>Osgair</u> (77d)</i>
75d	<i>Nách <u>diongamaois</u> osna lán mhór</i>	<i>Na <u>léigfeamáois</u> osna lánmhór (84d)</i>

Of these, 2c and 51d are likely to be scribal errors, the first a case of dittography since *caomh* also appears in the previous line, and the second a simple omission. In 68b, *chaoín* appears to have been omitted since the line now lacks a syllable. Words have been added in 26b, 27c, 37b, and 44a, making all these lines (with the possible exception of 26b) hypermetric. 68d has lost Osgar and at the same time it has been restructured to refer back to the previous line which has *mo mhac* (i.e. Osgar). The majority of the other differences are in line with other substitutions of near-synonyms of the same kind noted above although a few are worth a closer look. The substitution of *dóigfhir* (*recte d' óigfhir*) in q.58d is remarkable since it draws attention away from Osgar who is named in this quatrain (S. q.67) in all other versions. Q.60a (= S. q.69) incongruously introduces *Iollann mac Con*. This was probably initially the result of a misreading of *díom* which may have been reinforced

by the existence of various individuals named Iollann,<sup>40</sup> the most prominent of whom is Goll mac Morna whose alternative name Iollann appears frequently throughout various ballads.

Most of the variation in 24 L 7 indicates that the close agreement of the five versions discussed previously does not show the entire picture although it is still obvious that the scribal context of all manuscripts provided a considerable stabilising force. It is notable that none of the six texts show any difference in structure; even the problems of quatrain division in 24 L 7 can be explained by the loss of couplets. However, a certain variability in the heroic imagery suggests that the texts were not completely fixed. My own guess would be that in the variation of such material we see evidence for interaction between the written context, which provides stability, and an oral or at least mental environment which made use of the relatively freely interchangeable nature of this material in the wider sense and which could be incorporated by the scribes into their texts if they chose.

#### RIA 23 C 26 and its connections

A different strand of the Irish tradition is represented by RIA 23 C 26, written between 1770 and 1771 by Thomás Ó Súilleamháin. Its provenance is likely to be co. Clare since other material in the manuscript was written in 1782 by the Clare scholar and scribe Peadar Ó Conuill whose hand is also found in a number of notes in the part of the manuscript written by Ó Súilleamháin. This version is clearly related to the S. type, perhaps derived from it, but there are also some features which link it to TOS and the BDL type. Other characteristics suggest that this version deserves to be placed in a category by itself.<sup>41</sup> Of the features that set it apart, the loss of episodes is one; Patrick's interjection (S. q.71) and Oisín's final prayer (S. q.90) have dropped out. Displacement of episodes is another remarkable development in this version. The first example of this is the episode in which Fionn and the *Fian* mourn Osgar's death (S. qq.77-80); of this, only S. q.78 remains and is placed in a position in the episode in which the *Fian* bear the wounded Osgar away (q.39). It is worth noting that the BDL correspondent to this quatrain (BDL q. 39) appears in the same episode as in 23 C 26 although not in the same position. In the second example of transposed episodes, Fionn's long monologue (S. qq.56-70) now appears at the end of the ballad (qq.61-71) and S. qq.56, 61, 64, 69ab, and 70cd have been lost. This last development has resulted in a new q.71 consisting of S. qq.70ab + 69cd. This episode

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<sup>40</sup> DF III; p.376.

<sup>41</sup> Although there may well be related versions among those I have not investigated.

also shows small-scale change in q.63 (S. q.59) which has lost line a and expanded line c into two to compensate. Q.64 (S. q.60) likewise has lost its first line and this loss was compensated by a new line d. The final couplet of q.65 (S. q.62) appears in reverse order and q.68 (S. q.66) appears in the order cadb. It is, however, significant that the remaining quatrains appear in the same order as S., thus displaying a degree of stability which suggests that oral influence only seems to have played a subordinate role in the developments in this passage since the quatrains form lists which do not have to follow a particular order. However, a certain degree of oral influence appears to be present in the following differences to 3 B 9:

quatrain      23 C 26

61a *Slán uam feasda dInis Fáil*

61c *Slán uam daoibhneas is do gleo lann*<sup>42</sup>

62a *Slán do shlógaibh saora*

62b *Sdo Ríoganaibh folt cruabhacha*

66c *Unga óir eile do ghabhadh*

67a *Gan úrdhail a mbroid iomfhlaitha*

67b *Gan bhíothluig aluín gealadh*

67c *Na chíos do thabhairt do neach eile*

67d *Acht do mhac Cúmhaill lán mhór*

69d *Gan chíos lantrom dOsgur*

70a *Gach talamh fa sgéimh muir*

3 B 9

57a *Slán ceiliobhradh dInnis Fáil*

57c *Slán gan aoibhneas gan gleó lann*

58a *Slán uaim dfleaghaibh saora*

58b *7 do ríognaibh foltchaómha*

63c *Agas uinge dór eile*

65a *Gan urdhail an bhric go mblaidh*

65b *Ná'n bhaothláoigh áluinn allaidh*

65c *Gan cíos do thabhairt uim fhéile*

65d *Do mhac Cúmhaill airmghéire*

67d *Gan cíos fá lainn truim Osgair*

68a *Gan talamh fán aigéin muir*

The beginning of 61a (and b as well) parallels the opening of the first three lines of the lost quatrain which appears as S. q.56; perhaps we are dealing with an instance of conflation in an oral context rather than outright loss. While some changes employ only slightly different imagery it is noticeable that sound rather than writing seems to be involved here (62a, 67bc, 70a). Replacement or supplementing of perhaps defective lines appears to have taken place in 61a, 62b, 66c, 67ad; in the case of 67d the new *lán mhór*, while acceptable as appropriate in meaning, fails to provide rhyme with the previous line. 61c and 69d preserve the meaning of the line while being slightly different regarding the use of the prepositions involved. Perhaps the relatively high incidence of hyper- or hypometric lines (61c? 62ab, 67ac, 69d, 70a) in this selective sample could be taken as evidence for an oral context but line length is not treated particularly strictly in manuscripts or in the genre of ballads.

<sup>42</sup> An error of anticipation is present in line b: *Slán uam daoibhneas ban is macaomh*.

On the whole, this version is characterised by its loss of quatrains and couplets. Apart from those just mentioned there are no equivalents to S. qq.18, 20ab, 33, 34, 39, 41, 73, 74, 75, 81, 86cd (replaced by a new couplet cd in q.59), and 89. Despite these extensive losses, which may at least in part have occurred in an oral environment, the plot still functions satisfactorily.

An instance of apparent loss occurs in the case of qq.24 and 25 which are represented as couplets but correspond to S. q.24.

In only two cases has the order of quatrains within episodes been affected; in the Caoilte-Osgar dialogue (qq.33-37) the order compared to S. is qq.40, 35, 36, 37, 38 (missing 39), and 41. The positioning of S. q.40 is paralleled exactly by its position in TOS while verbally it agrees most closely with BDL 32a-d. In the other instance, the order of S. qq.84 and 85 has been reversed in qq.55 and 56, forming the episode telling of Fionn and Oisín's sadness.

Of particular interest is the treatment of six-line units in this version. S. 10 is represented by qq.10 (an unattached couplet and written as such in the manuscript) and 11 and S. 17 by qq.18 and 19 (another unattached couplet). Regarding the BDL six-line units, we have qq.4 and 5 (an unattached couplet) representing BDL 4; 29, a six-line unit, corresponds to BDL 24 while its S. equivalent (qq.28 and 29) has been expanded into two quatrains by the addition of a new couplet; BDL 32, corresponding to q.33, has lost its third couplet; BDL 33 and 35 are not represented; and BDL 41, corresponding to qq.42 and 43, has been expanded by a new couplet to form two quatrains in the same way as its S. equivalent. In the case of 21, this version has gained a new six-line unit consisting of S. qq.20cd and 21, following the loss of S. q.20ab. It is notable that in instances where the BDL and S. six-line units are not represented as such the scribe has chosen to write unattached couplets rather than attempt to re-order the existing quatrain structure; this would seem to indicate that Ó Súilleamháin, or an earlier scribe who provided his exemplar, was aware of the peculiarities of this ballad with its different six-line units present in all types of versions. TOS, with its regular quatrain structure, appears to be out of line with other versions, as evidenced by the order of TOS qq.4-9.<sup>43</sup>

On a structural level, the ballad still conforms to the standard of the S. type, regarding both the order and sequence of plot and episodes despite the differences set out above. Regarding the textual level and more particularly the heroic imagery in this version, the links to TOS and BDL are strengthened further although I am still

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<sup>43</sup> See this chapter, section c: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

inclined to regard this version as a development of the S. type with influence from both TOS and the BDL type.

An example of this is found in q.6a *Adúbhairt Brián go prap*. The S. type has replaced this individual with Cairbre, thus continuing Cairbre's speech of incitement begun in S. q.4. BDL names Barrán in q.5a and TOS has Parrán in q.4c. Brián in 23 C 26 is probably a mistake for Barrán/Parrán since *A Oisín cía in feart dona* clearly provides a *Cath Gabhra* context for this minor figure of the clanna Mórna<sup>44</sup> in q.81 where he is named as one of two individuals killed by Osgar and in q.85 where he is mentioned as the slayer of the sons of Caoilte and Osgar respectively. Perhaps it is even justifiable to argue that this minor *Cath Gabhra* tradition involving Barrán on Cairbre's side had become sufficiently obscure by the time the S. type took shape to prompt his replacement with Cairbre. Ó Súilleamháin's version would thus appear to represent a strand of tradition that predates the S. type. A Barrán-tradition appears to be present also in *Innis dúinn a Oisín* since he appears in RIA F V 5 (q.8c) and other versions in a list of heroes on Cairbre's side.<sup>45</sup>

Regarding the Heroic Code material in 23 C 26, it appears to be most closely linked to the S.-type. Certain differences, particularly omissions, may well be the scribe's fault since a certain carelessness is apparent in the manuscript.<sup>46</sup> Such ambiguous features have been left out of the following table which presents a selection of those differences between 23 C 26 and 3 B 9 which may have come in from an oral context:

quatrain	23 C 26	3 B 9
	3d <i>Na bagh Éirionn mághbhuig</i>	3d <i>Is gan báidh re biódhbhuibh</i>
	4c <i>Do bfeárr lín tuitim ionna cath</i>	4c <i>Is fear linn tuitim maile</i>
14a	<i>Dar do láimhsi a clérg crúaidh</i>	13a <i>Dar do láimhse a chleiricc cháidh</i>
14b	<i>Ní raibh sín sa Banba buan</i>	13b <i>Ní raibh san mBanba mbain</i>
21b	<i>Neach do bfeárr aigine 7 eólas</i>	20d <i>Fear do bfearr gaisge 7 misneach</i>
23c	<i>7 Caoilte mic Rónain de</i>	23c <i>Is táinigh Caoillte annde</i>
23d	<i>Ós cion Osguir mo mhac féin</i>	23d <i>Ós cionn a sheachtair clainne</i>
30b	<i>Is budh leor líomsa féin a chrúas</i>	30b <i>Fá leór liom a chruadhas</i>
36a	<i>Ó dían tuarguint sleadh na cloidhumh</i>	37a <i>Diantuargain laoch air bith</i>
36b	<i>[ ] ccruadh cath laochra ar bith</i>	37b <i>No ar cruaidh sleagh na clóidhiomh</i>

<sup>44</sup> DF III; p.345.

<sup>45</sup> Other RIA versions which mention Barrán are: 24 L 15, 23 C 30, 24 P 7, 23 O 35 (Bearan), 23 Q 18 (Beirán). TOS has Parrán.

<sup>46</sup> See the notes to this version in the Appendix.



51c <i>Mór ghoin do sleagh nimhnig</i>	54c <i>Áladh do shleagh Naoise</i>
53c <i>Sínan a dhá chois sa dha láimh</i>	72c <i>Síneas uaigh a dhá láimh</i>
54d <i>Budh chomhclos a nÉireann fada fuar</i>	75d <i>Bu clos fó Éirinn aghfhuar</i>
56b <i>On lá sin go lá an bhratha</i>	83b <i>Ón ló sin go hoidhche a bhais</i>
56c <i>A ccath a ccían níor bhfeidir a chur</i>	83c <i>A ngleó níor bhfeáirde a ghean</i>

Several lines (3d, 23c, 56c) have undergone major refashioning with a change in meaning in two cases. As in the previous comparison of material from these two versions, there is also an amount of replacement or supplementation in 4c, 14ab (note the preservation of both rhyme and alliteration in the new version), 21b, 23d, 30b, 51c, 53c, 54d, and 56b. Of particular interest here are the change in focus in 23d and the expansions in 4c, 30b, 53c, and 54d. In the case of 36ab, the two lines have become mixed up. Again, there is a noticeable proportion of hyper- and hypometric lines (4c, 21b, 30b, 36a, 53c, 54d, 56c) which in this unusual concentration may indicate an oral context.

It is clear that 23 C 26 does not conform to the fairly homogeneous picture presented by the other versions of the S.-type discussed above. Oral influence may have contributed to a certain amount of the differences in this version, particularly loss of material, while the stabilising force of the scribal tradition is also apparent. The links with the BDL-type and TOS are at first sight intriguing but since the existence of TOS shows that different types of this ballad were known in the middle of the nineteenth century contact between types is not surprising. The exact mechanisms of this contact, however, are now impossible to reconstruct, especially in the case of contact with the BDL-type, due to the scarcity or even lack of connecting versions.

### Versions of Innis dúinn a Oisín

Eighteen versions of this ballad are extant in the holdings of the British Museum and the Royal Irish Academy; to these can be added Ó Siochfhradha's composite version (S.), the version contained in the TOS compilation, and an Irish text found in NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.7. In length, they vary from 53 quatrains (RIA 23 Q 18, which contains a substantial lacuna) to 97 quatrains (RIA F V 5); the earliest version is dated 1711 to 1715 (RIA 23 L 34) and the latest c.1850 (TOS/RIA 23 M 2). Of these 21 versions, I have investigated fourteen in detail, taking the longest,



RIA F V 5, as a standard.<sup>47</sup> This identified of four distinct types of versions. Since they are easily recognisable, a discussion as detailed as in the case of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* is not necessary.

The first type consists of F V 5 (F.), written in 1787 by the Dublin scribe Henri Mac an tSaoir (97 quatrains), and its derivative S. (87 quatrains).<sup>48</sup> S. ends with F. qq.87; the remaining quatrains of the final Patrick-Oisín dialogue are also represented in the dialogue ballad *Innis dúinn a Phádraig*.<sup>49</sup> In S., the order of F. qq.64 and 65 is reversed; this follows RIA 24 L 15, another of the source versions used for S., which belongs to a different type. A number of different readings in F. and S. are paralleled in other source versions such as RIA 23 L 34 and 23 O 35 while some others are still unexplained. Perhaps these came from other sources used for S. but the possibility of editorial interference cannot be ruled out. However, S. is only of limited value for the investigation of the relationships between versions and types of versions since it draws its material from no less than four of the versions I have used (F V 5, 24 L 15 and 23 O 35, and probably 23 L 24).<sup>50</sup> Therefore I shall not discuss S. in any detail.

#### Versions related to RIA F V 5

##### **RIA 23 L 34, 23 O 79, and NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.7.**

Most closely related to F. is the group of versions consisting of RIA 23 L 34, 23 O 79, and NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.7.; the two last-mentioned manuscripts are particularly close to each other.<sup>51</sup> 23 L 34, written by Maurice Newby in Dublin between 1711 and 1715, is the oldest extant version and has 92 quatrains. 23 O 79, written between 1821 and 1824 by the co. Meath scribe Eóin Ó Fionnogáin, and Adv.72.2.7, collected and also written by Peter Turner in c. 1801, both contain 69 quatrains. All three versions have no equivalent to F. qq.8 and 64; 23 L 34 has also lost F. qq.72, 81, and 82. The two short versions lack F. qq.69 and 72 and end with

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<sup>47</sup> Some of the following has already been discussed in a different context in chapter 5, section b: *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne*, *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*. A certain amount of repetition is necessary here for the sake of clarity.

<sup>48</sup> Only F V 5 is given in the appendix.

<sup>49</sup> This provides Ó Siochfhradha's justification for his decision to leave them out. Op. cit. p.205. See also chapter 5, section b: *Truagh liom tulach na Féinne*, *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*.

<sup>50</sup> For the problems associated with Ó Siochfhradha's sources, see chapter 4, footnote 85.

<sup>51</sup> Only 23 O 79 and NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.7. are given in the Appendix, Part 1, Irish Texts: section a: Irish Versions of *Innis sin/dúinn a Oisín*.

the equivalent of F. q.73; both scribes treat their versions as complete by finishing with *finit* (23 O 79) and *críoch*<sup>52</sup> (72.2.7.) respectively. The final quatrain follows the long list of battle casualties preceding the final Patrick-Oisín dialogue but does not usually form the end of the episode which ends properly with F. q.75 in which Oisín addresses Patrick, thus rounding off the *Cath Gabhra* section of the ballad. Since the location Gabhair is mentioned in line b of this new final quatrain it forms a satisfactory ending to the ballad without, however, providing a *dúnadh*. This only occurs at the end of the Patrick-Oisín dialogue, indicating that this section was part of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* from an early stage onwards.

There is a very high level of verbal agreement between F. and 23 L 34, despite the seventy-year gap between them. However, F. is unlikely to have been copied from 23 L 34 since it is longer. They are both, however, written by Dublin scribes so that it is possible that they represent an ecotype current in that area. Most of the differences between the two texts give the impression of having happened on a purely scribal level; while most are not actual mistakes they seem to be misinterpretations of scribal abbreviations or handwriting. The following list shows the differences which cannot be explained in this way:

quatrain	23 L 34	F V 5
16d	<i>An aghaidh <u>cceann</u> mo mhicsi</i>	17d <i>An aghaidh <u>eacht</u> mo mheicsi</i>
17b	<i>Is fir Mumhan gan <u>treithe</u></i>	18b <i>Is fir Mhumhon <u>re Cairbre</u></i>
23a	<i><u>Do bhí freagra</u> Chairbre</i>	24a <i><u>Ann sin adubhairt</u> Cairbre</i>
26a	<i>Iarras Osgar <u>eachtach</u></i>	27a <i><u>Ann sin</u> íarras Osgur éachtach</i>
33a	<i><u>Gabhus</u> fearg mo mhacsa</i>	34a <i><u>Glacus</u> fearg mo mhacsa</i>
75d	<i>Ag maithiph <u>Fiann Éireann</u></i>	78d <i>Ag maithibh <u>na bhFíán</u></i>

It is worth noting that these few differences in a text extending to 87 quatrains involve heroic imagery or stock expressions; the addition of *ann sin* in F. q.27a expands the line to eight syllables compared to the usual six. In view of the extensive agreement, a scribal context seems more likely for these differences than oral influence but a final decision in this matter is again impossible.

A similar degree of textual stability can be observed between 23 L 34 and the first of the abbreviated texts, 23 O 79, which was written more than a century later. Again, the majority of differences can be explained as scribal error of one kind or another; the remaining ones are on a limited scale and need not be reproduced here as

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<sup>52</sup> This is the only word in the manuscript written in Irish script.

the examples shown above for 23 L 34 and F V 5 are of a very similar kind. Since 23 O 79 is associated with co. Meath, north-west of Dublin, the suggestion of an eastern ecotype, current in Dublin and surrounding areas, is further supported.

The version that parallels 23 O 79, 72.2.7, also displays the now familiar lack of variation. Although collected in Ireland in co. Meath, part of the significance of this version lies in the fact that it was copied from an Irish manuscript by a Scot, Peter Turner, whose collecting activity is well documented by the surviving manuscripts associated with him in the National Library of Scotland. The title given by the scribe, *Tuairisgeul chath Gabhradh, mur fhuaradh e san t shean Ghailig Eirionnach*, indicates the Irish origin of the piece and perhaps the emphasis on its antiquity may be taken to refer to a written source; the textual evidence would certainly tend to support a scribal context rather than an oral one. The material contained in the remainder of 72.2.7. is predominantly Irish and Peter Turner identifies himself as the scribe of the manuscript in several places; e.g. in the scribal colophon on the final page of the manuscript: '*Sgriobhtha le Paruig Tuarnair, coirpleir ann an cath bhuidhinn chois Earagheadhal ann an... Midhe san bliaghna... 1801*'.<sup>53</sup> This is a clear reference to co. Meath as the place where at least part of the manuscript was written and since Turner's version of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* is particularly close to 23 O 79, a co. Meath text, there is good reason to believe that Turner's version belongs to the co. Meath/Dublin context as well.

While the manuscript shows that Turner did not use the Irish hand to any great extent himself it is also clear that he was able to read it with relative ease as his version of the ballad is generally good. In those instances where Turner's text is inferior to either 23 L 34 or 23 O 79 it is impossible to determine whether Turner himself is at fault or whether he was following his exemplar. Although I do not think it likely that Turner knew a Scottish version of this ballad - since there are none extant - he may very well have been familiar with *Cath Gabhra* themes from a Scottish context. A Kintyre manuscript dated c. 1748 which was in his possession in 1808 contains a version each of *Innis dùinn a Fhearghuis* and *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.<sup>54</sup> The conventions and idiom of the ballad genre would obviously have been familiar to Turner so that it is likely that he would have been able to understand Irish texts with relatively little difficulty. In one instance Turner has clearly misinterpreted a scribal abbreviation. Q.31d runs *Mhic Fhinn Mhic Araill* where 23 O 79 has *A mhic Finn mhic Cuauill* (for *Cumhaill*). 23 O 79, and presumably

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<sup>53</sup> As quoted in Mackechnie's *Catalogue*; p.221.

<sup>54</sup> *Rel. Celt.* II; pp.310 and 386-391.

Turner's exemplar as well, uses an abbreviation for *cu* which could easily be mistaken for the common symbol for *ar/air* and Turner has obviously fallen into the trap.

The problem of omissions in Turner's version is significant. Examples of this occur in several instances as the following table shows:

quatrain	72.2.7.	23 O 79
3a	<i>Cia an ceathrar</i>	<i>Cia an ceathramhadh <u>duine</u></i>
3d	<i>Dheirte sna catha</i>	<i>Adeirtheadh <u>máothadh</u> catha</i>
25c	<i>Geall Cairbri</i>	<i>Geallas Cairbre <u>bhasgadh</u></i>
45a	<i>Deiche ceud Laoch</i>	<i>Deich gcead laoch <u>gan time</u></i>
51a	<i>Lion do cheannabh</i>	<i>Lion dha cheadaibh <u>sgiath</u></i>

In a text which is written one couplet per line these omissions concern words which would appear in the middle or at least not at the end of a line, that is, not in a visually prominent position despite the fact that most of them involve words that are likely to have a rhyming word in the next line. Also, in a long line made up from a couplet the absence of a word or two is far less likely to be noticed than in a line which only consists of one line of poetry. It is quite possible that these omissions have come about in a text which was written and being copied as one couplet per line but whether this happened at the stage of Turner's text or at some point previously is now impossible to determine.

Turner's own background can be detected in the presence of a number of Scotticisms in his text. These are quite likely to have slipped in inadvertently in the course of transliteration from the Irish hand of the exemplar into Turner's own contemporary hand. Turner uses a macron rather than the acute accent which would have been used in his exemplar. This has been represented by grave accents in my transcript of the manuscript since the grave accent would be more likely to be employed by a Scottish scribe although it is not clear which Turner himself had in mind. In keeping with most manuscripts, these accents are not applied consistently.

Another Scotticism is present in Turner's occasional use of a Scottish Gaelic definite article for the genitive plural; e. g. q.8d *nam beumann* where 23 O 79 has the conventional Irish nasalised form *na mbeimionn*. Turner also uses the hybrid spelling *na m beumann* in q.27b and the Irish form *na mbèuma* in q.15d. The Irish preposition *gan* is often represented in its Scottish Gaelic spelling *gun* (q.18d). Scottish Gaelic spelling conventions are apparent in q.5d and q.11d *feuma* where 23 O 79 has *feadhma*; in the above *nam beumann* examples; in q.25d *gheur lann* where 23 O 79 has *gheirlann*; in q.41c *deich ceud* for 23 L 34 *deich ccead* with nasalisation of



*cead*.<sup>55</sup> Turner does not indicate nasalisation in his text except before labials following a genitive plural definite article where Scottish Gaelic pronunciation offers a near-parallel. While this reflects in part his Scottish Gaelic background it is also important to remember that quite often Irish manuscripts are far from consistent in indicating nasalisation.

The Scottish Gaelic negative particle *cha* replaces its Irish counterpart *ní* in two instances, q.9a and q.63c. While *cha* is present in Ulster Irish and to some extent in the dialect of Donegal<sup>56</sup> a northern origin of Turner's exemplar is unlikely since Turner himself is at hand to take the blame for the accidental use of a form familiar to him.

Q.15c *'Naghai an coimhearsnaich* corresponds to *anaigheadh ar gcomhachtne* in 23 O 79 and Turner appears to have wrongly transliterated *cumhacht-ne* or a similar word since *coimhearsnach* is not listed in Irish dictionaries. Again, Turner does not indicate nasalisation after the possessive pronoun *an*, which perhaps represents a mistake for *ar*.

The above list of Scotticisms disregards minor orthographic variation and repeated occurrences of some differences noted here. Despite the interference of Peter Turner's native language in his transcript of this Irish version the agreement between 72.2.7. and its relatives 23 O 79 and 23 L 34 is striking since there is very little variation between them that is unlikely to have occurred anywhere but on a scribal level. The textual continuity in evidence in these three versions spans more than a century between 23 L 34 (1711-1715) and 23 O 79 (1821-1824).

#### **RIA 24 L15, 23 O35, 23 Q 18, 23 C 30, 24 P 7, and TOS**

These six texts can be shown to be related. The longest of them (RIA 24 L 15, 92 quatrains) was written in 1789 by J. Fowler but no provenance is given in the manuscript. RIA 23 O 35, written between 1772 and 1778 by the co. Galway scribe Brían Ó Fearthagail, contains 89 quatrains and has a very close relative in RIA 23 Q 18, written between 1789 and 1818 by the co. Roscommon scribe Edmund Hore. Hore's text only has 53 quatrains due to an unacknowledged and perhaps even unrecognised lacuna following q.18 at the bottom of p.378 (the *verso* of p.377) which very likely contained equivalents to 24 L 15 qq. 19-57. There is no break in the page numbering in the manuscript, apparently in Hore's own hand, at this point although the missing 36 quatrains could have filled the two sides of a missing page

<sup>55</sup> 23 O 79 has *x.c.* in this quatrain but indicates intended nasalisation in q.42d *x ccead*.

<sup>56</sup> T. F. O'Rahilly: *Irish Dialects Past and Present*; Dublin (DIAS) 1976; pp.165-168.

between pp.378 and 379. Further removed from 24 L 15 is TOS with its 92 quatrains. Another sub-type within this group of versions exists in the version of 89 quatrains in RIA 23 C 30, a composite manuscript which contains material written by various scribes in several locations between 1733 and 1812. The part of the manuscript which contains the present text is undated, unprovenanced and written by an unidentified scribe. A parallel version to this, containing 89 quatrains, is provided by 24 P 7, written by Edward Carolan of Dundalk; again we are dealing with a composite manuscript by several scribes which contains material from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>57</sup> Since three of these six versions are unprovenanced it is difficult to assign this type to a certain region, particularly since one of the remaining versions is associated with the east (24 P 7) and the other two with co. Roscommon. Brían Ó Fearaghail wrote 23 O 35 near Ballymoe, on the border between co. Galway and co. Roscommon, for the eighteenth century antiquarian and manuscript collector Charles O'Connor of Belanagare (died 1791).<sup>58</sup> A strong co. Roscommon link is thus evident for this manuscript.

Comparing 24 L 15 with F., it emerges that several quatrains are not represented in 24 L 15: qq.11, 45, 46, 50, and 75. None of these quatrains are essential to the plot and it could be argued that q.11 (Patrick asks how many king's sons took part in the battle) and q.75 (Oisín rounds off his account of the battle) are redundant since much the same ground is covered in qq.9 and 74 respectively. Of rather greater significance are qq.45 and 46, part of the description of Osgar's onset against Cairbre's army, and q.50, part of the account of the single combat between Osgar and mac Garaidh. Both episodes, however, still work satisfactorily without these quatrains. Further differences in structure are found in three instances of reversed order of quatrains. The first of these involves 24 L 15 qq.10 and 11 which are the equivalents of F. qq.12 and 10. This puts a new angle on the disappearance of F. q.11 since both this and q.9 begin with *Innis dhamh a Oisín*. A careless scribe may very well have mistaken q.9 for q.11 and followed it up with q.12, perhaps realising his mistake and continuing with q.10 in a new position. The plot makes sense in either sequence. F. qq.36 and 37, corresponding to 24 L 15 qq.36 and 35, are part of the combat between Osgar and Cairioll; both sequences are satisfactory. F. qq.64 and 65, the equivalents of 24 L 15 qq.61 and 60, are part of Oisín's long list of battle casualties where a particular sequence is not necessary in the first place. TOS has lost the same quatrains as 24 L 15 but in the case of different order of quatrains only

<sup>57</sup> Of these six texts, only 24 L 15 and 24 P 7 are reproduced in the Appendix.

<sup>58</sup> C. A. Sheehan: 'The O'Connor manuscripts in the Stowe Ashburnham Collection' in: *Studies* 41 (1952); pp.362-369; on p.364.



qq.61 and 60 have been reversed. 23 O 35 corresponds exactly to 24 L 15 in loss of quatrains and alteration of sequence except for the additional loss of F. qq.59, 60, and 65, all of which are non-essential quatrains. The extant part of the 23 Q 18 version parallels the structure of 24 L 15 as well. This leaves 23 C 30 and 24 P 7 which largely follow the structure of 24 L 15. In addition, F. qq.5 (Patrick asks for the names of prominent heroes) and 9 (Patrick asks for the strongest heroes taking part in the battle of Gabhair) have been lost. This is interesting because this eliminates a significant part of Patrick's share of the initial dialogue which may be intended to give a better flow to Oisín's narrative. Regarding changes in quatrain sequence, only the equivalents of F. qq.36 and 37 have been reversed; further on in the text, F. q.65, involved in reversed quatrain sequence in other versions, has been lost. At this point, structural differences would suggest a division of this type into four sub-groups: 24 L 15 and 23 Q 18, TOS by itself, 23 O 35 by itself, and 23 C 30 together with 24 P 7. On a textual level, however, matters turn out to be rather more complicated.

Generally, it is again noticeable that there is a significant amount of textual agreement between versions both within the present type and between F. and 24 L 15. Such variation as there is tends to be small-scale and probably the result of scribal error or misinterpretation or, in some cases, of scribal creativity. Detailed examination of the sub-group that shows the most structural differences from 24 L 15, 23 C 30 and 24 P 7, shows that the closest textual connection of all versions within this type exists between 24 L 15 and 23 C 30. 24 P 7, on the other hand, shows a higher incidence of textual variation with regard to both 24 L 15 and 23 C 30; comparison with 23 C 30 reveals that there is hardly any material in common within the body of shared material of these two versions. It would thus appear that the level of textual variation within this sub-group indicates a need for further subdivision but without further evidence provided by other versions this remains a tentative suggestion.<sup>59</sup> A close textual relationship emerges from a considerable amount of shared differences to 24 L 15 present in 23 O 35 and 23 Q 18, perhaps reflecting the geographical link that exists between these two versions. They are also the versions closest to 24 L 15 on a structural level so that it is reasonable to group 23 O 35 with 24 L 15 and 23 Q 18 for reasons of structural and textual agreement, allowing, however, for some variation to differing degrees between these versions. The textual variation in TOS is greater than its structural similarity to 24 L 15 would suggest although it is possible that O'Kearney used several sources for his text since the printed version and the manuscript version in 23 M 2 are not identical.

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<sup>59</sup> Two BM manuscript versions of 89 quatrains, Eg.138 and Add.18749, may provide additional information regarding this problem.

The above division of this type of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* thus needs to be amended to the following: 23 C 30 and 24 P 7 form a sub-group structurally but not textually while in addition 23 C 30 has a strong textual link with 24 L 15. A close structural connection exists between 24 L 15, 23 O 35 and 23 Q 18 and the two last-mentioned versions are closely related on a textual level. TOS remains in a sub-group on its own both for structural and textual reasons. While the variations within this type are distinctive, they can hardly be described as large-scale. This close affinity of all versions of this type to F. is as obvious as the relationship of the three sub-groups to each other.

### The Waterford type

A fourth type of *Innis dúinn a Oisín* appears to be strongly associated with the co. Waterford area. I have investigated three versions of this type, RIA 23 L 8 (87 quatrains), written in the early nineteenth century by Domhnall Mac Sheehy in co. Waterford; RIA 23 L 5 (86 quatrains), written between 1824 and 1826 by Risdard Paor in Cnoc Buidhe, co. Waterford; and RIA 3 B 28 (85 quatrains), written in 1816 by John Mara in Carrick-on-Suir which lies in co. Tipperary on the border of co. Waterford and co. Kilkenny.<sup>60</sup> Not only are these versions geographically close, they also date to the same period at the beginning of the nineteenth century; Moreover, 23 L 8 and 23 L 5 can be shown to be particularly close. This type is quite clearly the furthest removed from the other types of the ballad. Its most remarkable feature is the presence of eight quatrains from the ancillary text *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil* which were quite skilfully incorporated after the quatrain in which Fearghus File is portrayed as the reciter of a battle incitement prior to the battle of Gabhair proper ((Ó Siochfhradha q.4 and qq.37-44 in 23 L 8).<sup>61</sup> Qq.1-3, 5-6 and 9-11 of the 21 quatrains in Ó Siochfhradha's version are represented but appear in a different order with minor textual differences; Ó Siochfhradha's q.1 corresponds to q.1 of the passage, q.2 to q.4, q.3 to q.2 (with differences in line a), q.5 to q.5 in the order adcb, q.6 to q.7 in the order abdc, q.9 to q.3, q.10 to q.8 in the order adbc (with differences in lines d and c), and q.11 to q.6. The sequence of quatrains in these three versions is identical and there is very little textual variation. This praise passage occurs in an appropriate place in *Innis dúinn a Oisín* since its title in manuscripts usually runs *Rosg Osgair mhic Oisín re h-ucht chatha Gabhra* (RIA F V 5) and the ascription to Fearghus is

<sup>60</sup> 23 L 8 and 3 B 28 are found in the appendix.

<sup>61</sup> See also chapter 4, section c, sub-section: Core texts and ancillary texts (*Innis dúinn a Oisín* and *Éirigh a Osgair fhéil*).

likewise common.<sup>62</sup> Its metre, *rionnaird* of a better quality than in *Innis dúinn a Oisín*, may have facilitated the insertion of the text in the core ballad as well.

There are other shared features of these three texts which set them apart from other types of *Innis dúinn a Oisín*. Comparison with RIA F V 5 indicates a common pattern of losses of quatrains and occasionally couplets. A number of instances of different order of quatrains and lines also occurs in all three texts. Despite the sometimes considerable amount of variation compared to F. all episodes are represented in the Waterford type, some of them without losses or change of order although overall there is more variation in wording and particularly heroic imagery in this type than in the other types of versions.

Such small-scale change in wording as can be observed in the following example is present throughout the texts of the Waterford type:

F V 5	23 L 8
8. <i>Do bhudh mór gaisge Chonáin, Gidh nar chonáigh a bfocal, Baodhan 7 Barrán, 7 Áodhan geal ón Rócháidh.</i>	7. <i>Innis dham a Oisín calma, Anmona Fhiannaibh Éirion: Cía aco bo threise tacar Ag cur catha Gabhra na mbeimion?</i>
9. <i>Innis dhamh a Oisín, Re hanmuin Fhiannaidh Éireann, Cia agaibh budh treisi A ccath Gabhra na mbéimean.</i>	8. <i>Budh dho arr lucht gaisge Conán, Ce nár conach a fhocal; An fear maol gan aon tslacht, Is mac Fionáin ón Rochad.</i>
10. <i>Ní rabhmuirne acht beagan, Ag dol an aghaidh chríche Fódhla; Do bhí Fionn 7 a mhuinntear Ar turus slíge na Rómha.</i>	9. <i>Ní mór do bhadhmairne Ag dul dionnsídhe catha Gabhra; Do Fhionn agus a mhuintir Air slighe fhada na Rómhe.</i>

F. qq.8-9 appear in reverse order as 23 L 8 and 23 L 5 qq.8 and 7.<sup>63</sup> In 23 L 8 q.7, the additions in lines a, c and d set it apart from its F. equivalent. Lines a and c now have seven syllables each and the disyllabic final words *calma* and *tacar* provide imperfect internal rhyme with *anmona* and *catha* or *Gabhra* respectively, resulting in a satisfactory quatrain based on *rannai gheacht bheag*. The addition of *ag cur* in line

<sup>62</sup> Ó Siochfhradha, *Laoithe na Féinne*; pp.198-199.

<sup>63</sup> The third text, 3 B 28, here follows the order of F. but agrees in all other respects with the remaining Waterford texts for the rest of the initial dialogue.

d, however, makes that line hypermetric. 23 L 8 q.8 has replaced *Baodhan 7 Barran* of F.q.8c with another line of description of Conán Maol while Aodhán of F.q.8d has changed to Mac Fionáin. In 23 L 8 q.9b F.'s *an aghaidh chríche Fódhla* has been replaced by the more topical *dionnsídhe catha Gabhra* and *ar turus slíghe* of F.q.10d has become *air slighe fhada* in 23 L 8 q.9d. It is tempting to regard such differences as the result of an oral stratum but unfortunately this is impossible to prove at this stage. Certain other features, most notably the insertion of the praise passage, would seem to indicate a scribal context for at least some of the alterations.

Another striking characteristic of the initial dialogue passage of the Waterford type is the loss of F. qq.4ab and 7cd; the lone couplet 4cd has here become q.6cd; it has in effect replaced F. q.7cd. Both F. quatrains are significant in that they contain lists of prominent heroes and this part of each quatrain is preserved. Osgar, the most important of these heroes, is mentioned in the lost couplet F. 7cd; however, he does not drop out of the text but is incorporated in the new couplet 23 L 8 6cd where he takes Coirioll's place who in turn replaces mac Lughach in the next line. This deliberate rescue of Osgar may well indicate a scribal context for this particular change in the text.

In the list of participants in the battle, the equivalent to F.q.15 appears with the lines of the first couplet reversed in the Waterford type; the second couplet has undergone some reworking. In addition, 23 L 5 has lost F.q.17, probably the result of a scribal error.

The dialogue between Cairbre and mac Garaidh has lost F.q.25 in all three Waterford versions. In the episode telling of the conflict of Cairioll and Osgar, F.qq.35 and 37 have dropped out and F.qq.30 and 29 appear in reversed order.

The episode of Osgar's onset and his valour contains the ancillary praise passage. Moreover, F.q.42 is found much reworked as 23 L 8 q.47 and F. 46cd has dropped out but the resulting gap in 23 L 8 q.50 has been filled by compensatory repetition of q.51ab, the beginning of the next episode. 3 B 28, on the other hand, has lost F.q.46 completely, eliminating the need for awkward repetition in order to maintain the quatrain structure. 23 L 5 contains an interesting example of scribal error in qq.47-49. 47cd is written at the bottom of the page with insertion marks indicating the desired position. Since this couplet is identical with 49cd, present in its expected place, the scribe's supposed correction has actually created a new quatrain by making an error of anticipation as 47ab is repeated as 48ab and followed by its usual second couplet.

The only change in the episode telling of mac Garaidh's defeat by Osgar is the appearance of F.qq.53, 51 and 52 in this order; 3 B 28 has also lost F.q.50. There are no structural changes to the combat between Cairbre and Osgar.

In the dialogue between Patrick and Osgar enumerating the names and numbers of the fatalities on both sides, F.qq.60, 62, 64, 66 and 67 have dropped out and the remaining ones appear in the order F.qq.63, 58, 65, 59, 61, 70, 68, 71, 73, 69, 74 and 75, reflecting the fact that these quatrains consist mainly of lists and do not have to appear in any particular order to maintain the logic of the plot.

The following two episodes of this dialogue do not contain any structural changes except for the loss of F.q.82 in 23 L 5. In the part of the dialogue where Oisín asks for an account of heaven F.qq.88-92 have dropped out in the Waterford type but the *dúnadh*-quatrain appears as expected in 3 B 28; the remaining two Waterford texts have reversed F. lines b and c.

The close proximity of the Waterford texts on a structural level is obvious from the above summary. The losses of quatrains shared by 23 L 5 and 3 B 28 are probably accidental and do not detract from the overall impression of a close relationship. On a verbal level, it is notable that there are virtually no differences going beyond minor scribal errors or orthographic variation between 23 L 8 and 23 L 5. It is possible that 23 L 5 is a copy of 23 L 8 although the evidence is not entirely conclusive;<sup>64</sup> another explanation would be to suggest that both versions derive from a common exemplar. Greater variation on a verbal level is present in 3 B 28 although part of this may be explained as scribal error. The following example is representative of the variation that exists between this version and 23 L 8.

23 L 8	3 B 28
59. <i>Ann sin <u>tarladh o ardrígh Eirionn</u>, Aga raibh na thairm nimhe, A <u>gcorp Osgair na ngearlann</u> Gur ghoin se a chróidhe.</i>	57. <i>An san <u>taine rígh Eirionn</u> Aga raibh na hairm neime, A <u>gcone Osgair na ngéarlan</u>, Gur ghoin se a chroidhe.</i>
60. <i><u>Tuitios Osgar mo mhacsa</u> Ná fuair basgadh roimhe Gur chuir <u>an tsleagh sheanta gasda</u> Na cruis trí <u>an Rígh Cairbre</u>.</i>	58. <i><u>Nidh air tlás do chuadh dam mhacsa</u> Na fuair basga <u>riamh roime</u>; Do chuir a <u>shleagh sean ghasta</u> Na cruis trí <u>chean Chairbre</u>.</i>

<sup>64</sup> There appears to be widespread agreement regarding the ballad material in these two manuscripts but there are also some apparent differences according to the descriptions of these manuscripts in the RIA catalogue.

61. An sin goireadh Rígh Éirion  
Do mhac Cairbe crann ruadh;  
Do thuit an uair ceadna  
Re hOsgar arm ruadh.

59. Do goireadh rígh Eirion  
Do mhac Cairbre crann=ruadh;  
Do marbhadh san am ceadhna  
Le hOsgar go nan bhúan.

Comparison with versions of other types of *Innis dúinn...* shows that there is no significant overlap regarding the verbal differences between 3 B 28 and any other type I investigated. 3 B 28 would seem to indicate the presence of two distinct strands of tradition within the Waterford type although it is not possible at present to ascribe its distinguishing characteristics with certainty to a scribal or an oral context.



## **Chapter 6: Scottish Core Texts and Their Relationship**

The tradition first evidenced in BDL by the presence of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* and *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* continued well into the nineteenth century and versions of both core texts are extant. In addition, several strands of a different tradition, the Scottish Variant, would seem to testify to the independence and liveliness of Scottish ballad tradition. The plot of the Scottish Variant broadly resembles that of Osgar's death in Macpherson's 'Temora' of 1763.<sup>1</sup> Osgar and Cairbre fall out over a proposed exchange of spears. Cairbre flees from battle and wounds Osgar fatally with a spear cast from behind a rock and is killed himself. Fionn arrives and lamentation for Osgar is given a prominent part. There is no textual overlap between the Scottish Variant texts and the Gaelic 'Ossian.' The Scottish Variant was well established before Macpherson's poetry appeared and since MacNicol's and Stone's earlier texts are of Perthshire provenance it is not unlikely that Macpherson had access to similar texts in his native Badenoch as well. Alternatively, the strong showing of the Scottish Variant in the nineteenth century in the Islands may indicate that Macpherson encountered Scottish Variant texts there during his collecting tours; Young's version, probably of Mull provenance, is an example of an eighteenth century Hebridean text.

There are more and better texts of the *Cath Gabhra* ballads dating from the eighteenth century; in the nineteenth century, when the collecting activity of John Francis Campbell, Alexander Carmichael, and others yielded a number of good versions as well as some fragments, traditions appear to be much attenuated. On the whole, there is a great deal more of variety, of types, and of variety between related versions than in the Irish tradition, apparently reflecting the predominantly oral mode of transmission in Scotland.

### **Section a: the Parallel Texts: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin***

The five extant texts of this ballad fall into three distinct groups. The oldest text, BDL, is also the longest with 55 quatrains, some of them six-line units; these

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<sup>1</sup> [Ossian]: *Dana Oisein mhic Fhinn, air an cur amach airson maith coitcheannta muintir na Gaeltachd*; Dun-eidin (Edinburgh) 1818; especially pp.206-216. D.S. Thomson: *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson's Ossian*; Edinburgh/London 1951, pp.59-67, discusses the antecedents of 'Temora' but does not distinguish between the different types of relevant *Cath Gabhra* ballads.

have either been regularised or lost altogether in the later versions. Closest to BDL, and also standing by itself, is the latest text (c.39 quatrains), collected in 1854 from Christina Sutherland by George MacLeod and James Cumming.<sup>2</sup> The remaining three texts form a group and include a text of 32 quatrains, collected in c.1750, in the McLagan collection (manuscript 69);<sup>3</sup> a version collected by the Rev. Alexander Campbell of Portree in c.1797 containing 35 quatrains;<sup>4</sup> and a text of 36 quatrains found in Peter Turner's manuscript 14.<sup>5</sup> This manuscript, now NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.2., although in Turner's possession in 1808, was written by William MacMurchy in the mid-eighteenth century, probably before 1748, and has strong Kintyre associations.<sup>6</sup> The two last-mentioned texts are particularly close. All four later texts also contain accretions from the Scottish Variant, suggesting that *Mòr anocht...* texts existed alongside Scottish Variant versions in an oral environment.

### Christina Sutherland's text and BDL

The link between BDL and Christina Sutherland's version was already noticed by Thomas MacLauchlan who printed it in the appendix to his edition of poetry from BDL;<sup>7</sup> he also gave the text to J.F. Campbell who observes in a note he prefaced to the manuscript copy 'that this manuscript differs materially from the printed version.' Campbell's 'material differences' are mostly of an orthographic nature except for an instance where Malcolm Macphail, his scribe, left out six lines after q.23: *Ag iarraidh mo chorpsa 's a chath, 'us corp Osgair an aird fhatha,/ Corp Caoilte nach tinn, deagh mhic a pheathair ionmhuinn./ Chunnaic sinn nis Fionn, 'us e 'g imeachd feadh an t-sloigh.*<sup>8</sup> The last two lines are clearly a repetition of q.23cd: *Fionn Mac Cumhail is e treunmhor,/ is e 'g imeachd feadh an t-shloigh* and this is probably how Macphail's mistake crept in. The preceding four lines do not correspond to any BDL

<sup>2</sup> Extant in NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.7. (ff.161-166). See Appendix, Part 2, Scottish Texts: section a: *Mòr anocht mo chumha féin*.

<sup>3</sup> Published in *Rel.Celt.* I, pp.329-332.

<sup>4</sup> This unpublished text is found in NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.3. (ff.40-44). See Appendix, part 2, section a: *Mòr anocht mo chumha féin*. A text which is virtually identical to this, although without any background information, is in NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.10. (ff.59-60) but will be disregarded here because of its lack of differences.

<sup>5</sup> Published in *Rel.Celt.* II, pp.387-391, and not to be confused with Adv.72.2.7. which yielded Turner's Irish version of *Innis duinn a Oisín*.

<sup>6</sup> D. MacKinnon: *A Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh...* Edinburgh 1912; p.278 refers to the probable dating of the manuscript. For a full description of the manuscript see R.I. Black: *The Gaelic Manuscripts of Scotland*, vol.2 Scottish Gaelic Manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland, unpublished draft copy in NLS.

<sup>7</sup> T. M'Lauchlan (ed. & tr.): *The Dean of Lismore's Book*; Edinburgh 1862; pp.133-135.

<sup>8</sup> MacLauchlan prints this as one couplet per line.

quatrain but appear as q.42 in the TOS version of *Mór anocht*.... They do not appear to be extant in any other Scottish version of the *Cath Gabhra* ballads and this serves as a reminder that the patchy distribution of surviving Scottish versions in space and time cannot give an accurate picture of the mechanisms of, or influences on, the transmission of texts.

Although all BDL episodes are represented in varying degrees of completeness, there have been some structural changes through losses and accretions. The explicit Patrick-Oisean framework is preserved although the first quatrain no longer addresses the saint directly; the initial episode has also lost BDL q.3 and thus only contains two quatrains. In the episode telling of Cairbre's enmity and counsel (qq.3-8), there are no equivalents to BDL qq.6cd, 7 and 8, qq.6-8 are not in BDL, and qq.3, 4 and 5 show the order BDL qq.5, 6 and 4. The poor state of preservation of this episode is also illustrated by the fact that q.3 has only three lines while 4 and 7 are couplets. The episode listing the *Fian*'s lost tributes after the battle has been reduced to one quatrain (q.9) with its initial couplet reversed; BDL qq.10-12 are lost. The dialogue between Patrick and Oisean lacks BDL qq.13-14 and has been split up to appear as q.12 in its expected position and as q.38 in the rounding-off of the ballad. Patrick's following question about Osgar's fate is present in qq.13 and 14 more or less as expected. Of the episode in which Oisean, Caoilte, and the *Fian* lament the dead only the initial couplet corresponding to BDL q.19ba remains, combined with a new second couplet (q.15), while BDL qq.19cd-23 have dropped out. Since the surviving couplet tells how Oisean finds the wounded Osgar who is also the subject of the next episode, it seems that the 'general lament' episode has in effect been lost altogether and that greater prominence is thus given to the fate of Osgar. Of the meeting between Osgar and Oisean, and Caoilte's arrival, only BDL 24a-d has dropped out while BDL 24ef is preserved in q.22, beginning with a new complementary couplet. This quatrain has itself become displaced and attached to the dialogue between Caoilte and Osgar, leaving only qq.16-18 for the Oisean-Osgar dialogue. The Caoilte-Osgar dialogue, then, has lost BDL qq.30 and 32-33a-d and q.19 is not represented in BDL; the remaining couplet of the BDL episode (33ef) appears as the second couplet of q.32 in the dialogue between Fionn and Osgar. Of the episode telling how the *Fian* bear Osgar away BDL qq.34-35 and 36bcd have dropped out, leaving qq.21 and 23a; of the burial of the dead and the mourning of Osgar, BDL q.38 has been lost and the remaining q.35 has become attached to the episode in which Fionn weeps for Osgar. Fionn's arrival (qq.23b-26 and 37) has lost BDL 41ab; the remainder of this six-line unit is found as lines b and c of q.23 while the third couplet forms the initial couplet of q.37, combined with two new lines, in a

position following the quatrain telling of the *Fian*'s three shouts of sorrow. The dialogue between Fionn and Osgar and Osgar's death (qq.27-32ab and 33) has lost BDL qq.45, 46cd, 47, and 49; qq.28-31 are accretions from the Scottish Variant and appear in the order Gillies A qq.51ab54cd, 51cd + new couplet, 52ab + new couplet, 63ab52cd.<sup>9</sup> Both BDL quatrains telling of Fionn's weeping for Osgar and the three shouts of the *Fian* are represented as qq.34 and 36 respectively. The penultimate episode of BDL, telling of the number of the dead on both sides, has been misplaced to a position preceding the Patrick-Oisean dialogue (qq.10 and 11). The ballad ends with a statement of Oisean's sadness (q.39), having lost BDL q.54.

These structural changes appear at first sight bewildering. It is, however, evident that displaced material consistently reappears in an appropriate context. The displacement of a comparatively large amount of couplets, not only quatrains, serves as a reminder of the fact that *deibhidhe* is a couplet-based metre and as such the smallest unit is as likely to be transposed as the quatrain proper. The following example shows several examples of transposed material (marked \*) and one of possible new composition to make up a quatrain (marked §):

Sutherland	BDL
32 <i>Mo thruaigh sin Oscar fheile!</i> <i>'Sa dheagh mhic mo mhica fein,</i> <i>Bha sgarradh na sleagh o do dhruim,</i> <i>'N am togail cìs do sliochd mhoir Choinn,</i>	46a <i>Truagh, a Osgair arnaidh, é,</i> b <i>A dheighmhic mo mhicse féin;</i> *33e <i>'S sgar &lt;rath catha&gt;ré Fionn:</i> f <i>Bidh na cíos[a] ag síol mórChuinn.</i>
33 <i>D' eisdeachd ri briatharibh Fhinn,</i> <i>An ainm an Oscair dhuinn</i> <i>Shìn e uaith a dha laimh,</i> <i>Is dhùn e 'n rosg s bha ro mhall,</i>	49 <i>Ré claisdin céalmhaine Finn</i> <i>Anam a hOsgar do ling;</i> <i>Do shìn é bhuaithe an dá láimh</i> <i>Is do dh'iadh a rosg rionnbhláith.</i>
34 <i>Theanndadh Fionn ruim a chul</i> <i>Is shil e deuribh gu dluth,</i> <i>An taobh muigh d' Oscar is do Bhran</i> <i>Gun chaonamh air neach bh' air thalamh,</i>	50 <i>Do thionntuigh Fionn ruinne a chúl,</i> <i>Do shil é déara go dúr;</i> <i>Ach fá Osgar is fá Bhran</i> <i>Cha d'rinn sé déar air talmhain.</i>

<sup>9</sup> Two texts, here designated A and B, are printed in the Gillies collection. For details regarding Gillies A see this chapter, section c, sub-section: *Cha'n abair mi mo thriath re m' cheol*. For Gillies B see *ibid.*, sub-section: *An cuala sibhse turus Finn*.

- 35 *Cha chaonamh duinn a mhac fein,  
'S cha chaonamh e bhrathar a dheigh  
Bha sinne mar sin uile,  
'S gach aon neach caonamh Oscar,*
- \*39 *Níor chaoín neach a mhac féin,  
Níor chaoín a bhráthair fá dhéidh;  
Ré faicsin mo mhicse mar soín,  
Cách uile a' caoineadh Osgair.*
- 36 *Mhan ach mi fein is Fionn,  
Cha robh aon neach os a chinn,  
Nach tug trí glaodhan m'an uaigh,  
Chuir ciosdair Éirinn ri aon uair,*
- 51 *Ach mise fhéin agus Fionn  
Ní roibh a dh'Fhéin bhos a chionn;  
Thug iad trí ghártha 'san uair  
A clos fá Éirinn adhuair.*
- 37 *D' eisdeachd ri beucadh namh fear,  
Is screadal nan co-mhileadh,  
§ Ri faicinn an t ogfhear treun,  
§ Is e na luidh na mhaoth neul,*
- \*41e *Do bu thruagh béiceach na bhfear  
f & sgannal na míleadh.*
- 38 *Ge be righ thigeadh sin  
Gheabhadh e fodadh gun aoidh,  
Gun fuathach gun umhladh,  
Gun an dail gun achmhasan gun iomadan.*
- \*15 *Gé bé rí thíosadh an sin  
Gheobhadh sé Fódla a n-aisgidh,  
Gan chath gan iorghail gan ágh  
Gan <eana[ch]> gan achmhusán.*

This passage includes the end of the Fionn-Osgar dialogue with Osgar's death, Fionn's weeping and the three shouts of the *Fian*. Q.32cd (BDL 33ef) has come in from the Caoilte-Osgar dialogue; q.35 (BDL q.39) was originally part of the episode in which the *Fian* bury the dead and mourn Osgar; q.37ab (BDL q.41ef ) is associated with Fionn's arrival and appears to have been attracted to this position by the shared motif of shouts of grief; q.37cd is likely to be a compensatory couplet; and q.38 (BDL q.15) was originally part of the Patrick-Oisean dialogue. And yet, the Sutherland passage makes sense and hangs together well. At the same time, the two passages demonstrate the extent of verbal difference that occurs in an oral environment: in most cases in this passage, the sense of the BDL equivalent is preserved while using different words although there is a higher degree of stability in words that are involved in rhyme.

It is also important to remember that the two texts are separated by three centuries during which the development of this strand of ballad tradition is not documented. Therefore it is impossible to determine whether BDL is a direct ancestor of Sutherland's version or not; we do not even know whether the BDL text was part of current mainstream tradition regarding this ballad. The evidence provided



by the extant Scottish texts and the selection of Irish versions discussed above would seem to indicate that it may well not have been a mainstream version.<sup>10</sup> The Dean of Lismore may deliberately have chosen a text that was different from the hypothetical contemporary mainstream texts, and perhaps the ascription to a particular *ughdar*, Ailéin mac Ruaidhrí, an uncommon practice in ballad terms where an ascription to Oisean or Fearghus File is conventionally given, may indicate that the Dean took it down as a ballad version that he considered as specifically connected with Ailéin mac Ruaidhrí, possibly the source or reciter of this text. Since Ailéin mac Ruaidhrí was also the *ughdar* of the BDL version of *Laoidh Dhiarmaid*, a ballad with very strong Perthshire connections,<sup>11</sup> a Perthshire provenance for the BDL text of *Mór anocht...* is not unlikely.

Christina Sutherland was born in Reay in 1775 and her version thus belongs to the Caithness-Sutherland region.<sup>12</sup> There is thus a considerable geographical distance between BDL and this version although there is no reason why a ballad version or type should not be able to travel such distances, given time and a succession of competent tradition bearers. Christina Sutherland's version is best described as a representative of a strand of *Mór anocht...* that is closely related to BDL but has developed differently in a number of respects. That ballad tradition in general was lively in the far north-west as well was already shown by the Rev. Alexander Pope's ballad collection made from oral tradition in Reay in 1739.

### **McLagan 69, MacMurchy, and Campbell of Portree**

The group of texts that includes McLagan 69, MacMurchy, and Campbell of Portree is further removed from BDL than Sutherland.<sup>13</sup> There is more accretion of material from the Scottish Variant and a number of entire BDL episodes have dropped out. All three texts have lost Cairbre's enmity and counsel (BDL qq.4-8), the *Fian*'s burial of the dead and the mourning of Osgar (BDL qq.38-39), the numbers of the dead on both sides (BDL qq.52-53), and the final account of Fionn's and Oisean's sadness (BDL qq.54-55).

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<sup>10</sup> In a Scottish context, mainstream tradition may be represented by the eighteenth century texts of McLagan 69, MacMurchy, and Campbell, judging by the available evidence. See this section, sub-section: McLagan 69, MacMurchy, and Campbell of Portree.

<sup>11</sup> Meek: 'Death of Diarmaid,' pp.343-345.

<sup>12</sup> *LF*, p.119.

<sup>13</sup> The Rev. Alexander Campbell of Portree adapted a number of the ballads he collected from oral tradition in order to make them conform to Macpherson's style but this text does not fall into this category. See A. Gunderloch: '18th Century Literary Fraud and Oral Tradition: the "Real" Ossian' in: Dietrich Scheunemann (ed.): *Orality, Literacy and Modern Media*, Columbia ; pp.44-61.



McLagan has also lost the Patrick-Oisean dialogue, giving this version only an implied Patrick-Oisean framework. There are further shared structural changes in the form of losses of quatrains and couplets and also in the shape of displaced episodes. The first episode has lost the initial address to Patrick and BDL qq.2 and 3, leaving only the indication of Oisean's grief in q.1. The episode describing the lost tributes of the *Fian* has been reduced to q.2 by the loss of BDL qq.10-12. Patrick's request for an account of Osgar's fate appears as q.5, having lost BDL q.17 while the BDL episode telling how Oisean, Caoilte and the *Fian* lament the dead has lost BDL qq.19-22 and has been transposed to a position before Patrick's request (qq.3-4). Qq.6-12ab form the episode in which Oisean finds his son and Caoilte arrives; BDL 24cd and q.29ab have dropped out. In MacMurchy and Campbell, the order of the McLagan quatrains appears as 6, 7, 10, 8, 9, 11, and 12ab. The Caoilte-Osgar dialogue follows in qq.12cd-21, with the loss of BDL qq.30-31 and 32ef. The BDL six-line units 32 and 33 have been regularised; BDL 32, appearing as q.16, has lost its third couplet while BDL 33ab forms q.12cd here, followed by BDL 33c-f as q.13. Qq.14, 15, and 17-21 have apparently come in from a text belonging to the Scottish Variant.<sup>14</sup> However, qq.14, 17, and 19-20 are not represented in the extant texts belonging to the Scottish Variant although q.19cd is reminiscent of Gillies A, q.52cd. Q.15 consists of Gillies q.52ab and another couplet and has a close parallel in Sutherland q.30; q.18 parallels Gillies q.51; and q.21 is close to q.114 of Kennedy's first collection.<sup>15</sup> The usual context for the identified quatrains is not the Caoilte-Osgar dialogue, as in MacMurchy, McLagan and Campbell, but the Fionn-Osgar dialogue. It is possible that the so far unidentified quatrains were specifically composed to elaborate on the context provided by the quatrains that belong to the Scottish Variant. It is also possible that these quatrains come from a strand of the Scottish Variant which is not extant; the presence of q.15 in Sutherland q.30 and the frequent presence of parallels to q.18 in all types of the Scottish Variant would appear to support this view. Moreover, q.19cd uses a motif that is strikingly similar to one that occurs almost consistently throughout the Scottish Variant. Matters are clearer regarding the other two passages that have come in from the Scottish Variant. The first of these, qq.28-30 (McLagan qq.27-29) is closely paralleled by Gillies qq.63 (although with a reworked second couplet), 59 and 57. The second passage, qq.33-34 (McLagan q.32, corresponding to MacMurchy q.33), is paralleled by Gillies qq.62, again with a reworked second couplet, and 60. The reworked couplets, which

<sup>14</sup> MacMurchy qq.17-22. MacMurchy q. 20 is not found in the other two versions and appears to be an elaboration of q.19cd.

<sup>15</sup> *LF*, pp.185-189.

preserve the sense of the Gillies couplets, could again be interpreted as potential evidence for another type of the Scottish Variant, not extant now, which could have provided the quatrains which intruded into this type of *Mór anocht*...

In the episode following the extraneous quatrains in the Caoilte-Osgar dialogue, the arrival of the *Fian* to bear Osgar away, BDL qq.34-35 have dropped out, leaving only qq.22-23 (MacMurchy qq.23-24). Fionn's arrival has been shortened to q. 24 (MacMurchy q.25) by the loss of BDL qq.41-43. The Fionn-Osgar dialogue takes up qq.25-30 (MacMurchy qq.26-31), including the three quatrains from the Scottish Variant and lacking BDL qq.45, 47, and 48. In both MacMurchy and Campbell the McLagan quatrains appear in the order 25, 26, 28, 29, 27, and 30. Fionn's weeping for Osgar is represented by qq.31-33 (MacMurchy qq.32-34), incorporating the final section from the Scottish Variant and having lost BDL q.51. MacMurchy and Campbell conclude with a misplaced episode (qq.35-36 and 34-35 respectively) corresponding to part of the Patrick-Oisean dialogue, having lost BDL qq.15-16; McLagan lacks the entire Patrick-Oisean dialogue and finishes appropriately with a quatrain telling of the general mourning at Osgar's death.

The structural differences between this type and BDL may well have been consciously achieved since the result of lost and transposed episodes is a concentration on Osgar's death with non-essential material either no longer present, or moved to a new position at the beginning or end of the ballad, or shortened to contain a minimum of necessary information. The accretions from the Scottish Variant have become attached to the dialogues between Caoilte and Osgar or Fionn and Osgar and to Fionn's weeping for Osgar, again maintaining the strong focus on the death of Osgar. All three versions show a certain amount of verbal disagreement, in keeping with the expected situation in an oral environment, but are still quite close together. More variation is present between them and BDL, reflecting also the fact that more than two centuries separate them. The following passage demonstrates both change and agreement and combines the episodes where Patrick asks for an account of Osgar and where Oisean finds his son.

q. BDL

18 [A] *Oiséin, innis domh sgéal,*  
*'Nuair chuir sibh an iorghail t[h]réan,*  
*'Nuair thuit do mhac-sa 'sa chath,*  
*<Na> d' rug tú air air labhracht?*

q. MacMurchy

5 *Aithris duinne Oisín fheil'*  
*Nois o 's binn leam pfein do ghloir*  
*An dfuair tu do mhac san ár*  
*No ndrúg tu air urlabhthra*

24 'S ann a fhuair mé mo mhac féin  
 'Na laighe air a uilinn chlé,  
 Is sgiath <[a] ndáimh ris> air an lár  
 Agus a lann 'na dheaslaimh,  
 Tonnfhuil fhola ar gach leath de  
 Air bloighe a lúirighe.

6 Dfuaras mo mhac fearrdha fein  
 Is e na luighe air uilinn chle  
  
 Is e 'sileadh fhola te  
 Trid bloighte a luirghe

25 Leigim earla mo shleighe ré lár  
 Is do-rinneas ós a chionn támh;  
 Smuainim, a Tháilginn, air soin  
 Créad a dhéanainn 'na aghaidh.

7 Leig Earladh mo shleagh re lár  
 'S os a chionn do rinneas támh  
 Sa phadruig do smuaintios an sin  
 Creud do dhearnfainn na Dhiaidh

q. McLagan

5 Aithris duinne Oisein fheilidh,  
 Anois o 's binn leam fein do ghloir,  
 An d' fhuair do mhac bas san chath,  
 No, 'n d' rug thu air ur-labhradh?

q. Campbell

5 Aithris dhuinne Ossain fheal,  
 Nis o's binn leam fein do ghloir,  
 An d'fhuair thu do mhac sin ar,  
 Na an drug thu air urlabhra.

6 Do fhuair mise mo mhac fein  
 Is e na luidheadh air uileann chle,  
 Is e a sileadh fhola teith,  
 Trid bhloidhibh a luirich.

6 Fhuaras mo mhac feurail feun,  
 Is e na luidh air uillin chli,  
 Is e sileadh fhola teath  
 Trid blaidh a luireach.

7 Chuireas urlann mo shleagh re lar,  
 Is rinneas os a cheann tamh,  
 Ag smuaineacha' le bron ann sin,  
 Creud a dheanainn na dhiaidh.

7 Leig mi mo shleadh air an lar,  
 Is os a chionn do rein mi tamh;  
 'S O! Phadric do smaoinich mi 'sin,  
 'S cruaid do Sheanair na d luidhe.

The type represented by MacMurchy, Campbell and McLagan is ultimately derived from the BDL type but has undergone more extensive changes than Sutherland. The passages from the Scottish Variant would appear to indicate coexistence of the two types to enable accretion such as described above to take place; the *deibhidhe*-type rhyme found in some of the interpolated material would certainly have aided interpolation into a text which employs this metre.

## Section b: *Innis dúinne, a Fhearghuis*

The other core text contained in BDL, *Innis dúinne, a Fhearghuis* (BDL XXI), has a number of other versions in Scottish tradition. The earliest extant one was written down after 1745 by William MacMurchy and contains eight quatrains, compared to BDL's 14. This is prefaced by a prose argument which links it with a preceding version of a Scottish Variant text beginning *Nuar do chualas turus Finn*.<sup>16</sup> A very close relative of this is found in Turner manuscript 14;<sup>17</sup> this contains eight quatrains as well and precedes the text of *Mór anocht...* although there is no explicit device linking the two texts. This manuscript was also written by William MacMurchy, prior to 1748, and the two texts are nearly identical. The Turner text also prefixes a prose argument although this is shorter than the one linking the text to *Nuar do chualas turus Finn*. A version of 25 quatrains appears in Kennedy's two collections, dated 1774 to 1783, and is incorporated in Kennedy's Scottish Variant version beginning *'S muladach mi fad o 'm dhaoine* where it forms the second part of the text (qq.83-107).<sup>18</sup> While Kennedy's texts are problematic, there appears to be a long-standing tradition of association of *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis* with other *Cath Gabhra* ballads as demonstrated by BDL and the two MacMurchy texts.

The type represented by the two MacMurchy texts is an abbreviated version of BDL. All episodes except the final quatrain of identification of Fearghus File (BDL q.14) are represented although a number of BDL quatrains have been lost. Fionn's first question (q.1) appears as expected but the next episode (qq.2-3), in which Fearghus File lists several prominent heroes who fell in the battle of Gabhair, has lost BDL qq.3-5 and q.3 itself is not found in BDL. Fionn's question regarding Osgar's conduct (q.4) is close to BDL while Fearghus' following praise of Osgar (qq.5-6) has lost BDL q.7 and replaced BDL q.8cd with a new couplet (q.6cd). Cairbre's attack is represented by q.7 although BDL q.11 which dealt with Cairbre's fatal attack on Osgar is missing and represents an uncharacteristic loss of a quatrain containing vital information. The ballad ends with an account of Osgar's killing of Cairbre and Art (q.8), lacking BDL q.12. This final quatrain was adapted slightly since BDL q.12 dealt with Cairbre and q.13 with Art; the order of the BDL couplets is reversed, with Cairbre now being introduced as *Rìgh Eirionn* in line a.

<sup>16</sup> *Rel.Celt.* I, pp.110-112, a fairly unreliable transcript of NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.15., pp.27-29.

<sup>17</sup> *Rel.Celt.* II, pp.386-387, printed from NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.2.

<sup>18</sup> *LF* pp.185-189; the present passage is found on pp.187-188.

On a verbal level, there is some variation between MacMurchy and BDL as the following example indicates although a generally high level of agreement is evident.

q. BDL	q. MacMurchy/Turner
10 <i>Mar chonnaic rígh Éireann</i> <i>Bhuaidh ar lár a' chatha,</i> <i>Thug Osgar 'na choinneamh</i> <i>Mar tharbh tuinne &lt;treathai[n]&gt;</i>	7 <i>Chunnairc se Ríogh Eirionn</i> <i>A stigh an lár catha</i> <i>S thug se ruathar chuige</i> <i>Mar fhuaim tuinn'air Sratha.</i>
13 <i>Buailis Art mac Cairbre</i> <i>Air an darna buille;</i> <i>'S amhlaidh a bhí an fearsin</i> <i>'S a mhionn ríogh uim[e].</i>	8 <i>Do marbh se Ríogh Eirionn</i> <i>Is an Coron uime</i> <i>'S thuit leis Airt Mac Chaibre</i> <i>Air an dara buille.</i>

Kennedy's two texts of 25 quatrains each are significantly longer than BDL and the two MacMurchy texts. Accretion of additional quatrains and couplets, some of them replacing BDL-type material, are a prominent feature. The final quatrain of BDL, identifying Fearghus File, here appears at the beginning of the ballad, combined with Fionn's request for an account of the battle (qq.1-2).<sup>19</sup> Fearghus' list of fallen heroes (BDL qq.2-5) has been extended to include qq.3-14; BDL qq.3, 4cd and 5 are not represented and BDL q.4ab forms q.6ab, combined with a new compensatory couplet. Q.4 corresponds to MacMurchy q.3, not present in BDL, and qq.5, 6cd, 7-14 do not have BDL or MacMurchy equivalents. Of these quatrains, Kennedy has marked qq.10-14 as material of his own composition in both manuscripts of his collection.<sup>20</sup>

Kennedy appears to be too modest about his own contribution; perhaps he ought to have included the rest of the non-BDL material as his own as well (qq.5, 6cd, 7-9) since all quatrains follow the same pattern of construction. The personal names in this extended list are a curious mixture of names that have parallels in the ballads, names that patently belong to other contexts, and of names that may have been invented to fill gaps. Of the BDL names, the following survive: Osgar (q.3c), Caoilte's seven sons (q.9b), Mac Lughach (as *na mic Luthaic*) (q.6a), his six sons (q.6b), and *Fian Breatan* (q.14c). There is no trace of BDL's *Fian Almhan*, *óig na Féine*, *óig na h-Almhan* and *mac ríogh Lochlann*. It is worth noting that Caoilte's

<sup>19</sup> The LF quatrains 83-107 are here renumbered for ease of reference.

<sup>20</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.72.3.9. (ff.79r-90r, old numbering pp.145-167) and 72.3.10. (pp.137-157).



seven sons and the *fian* of Britain belonged originally to BDL quatrains that are no longer extant in Kennedy or MacMurchy. Other names may have been suggested by the preceding part of Kennedy's text; e.g. *Rígh Laitheann* q.60a > q.6.d, *Mugan seirce* q.59a (*Mogan Mac Seirce*) > q.7a, Art q.21a (of the present section of Kennedy's composite text) > q.8c, Daoire (*dearg*) q.5a > q.9c, Aogh (*geal*) q.4c > q.9c, and Ioghlan q.4a (Iolainn) > q.14c. The names Art (q.8c), *Aogh geal* (q.9c), Oscar Gharidh (q.11c, presumably for Osgar mac Garaidh), Béirnnidh (q.11b, for Beinde?), Fionn Breatan (q.14c for *Fian Breatan*), and Mac Breastail (q.14d for mac Breasail?) all link up with the Irish core text *Innis duinn a Oisín* and may indicate that *Cath Gabhra* traditions similar to those of that ballad were known in Scotland in Kennedy's time since he incorporated these significant names in his list. Yet another group of names belongs to a more general ballad context: e.g. Fionn's son Raoinidh (q.8c), Fearraghuin (q.11d) - apparently a variant of the invader-figure of *Teanntachd Mhòr na Fèinne*, named Earragan in Gillies'<sup>21</sup> version, CúChulainn's son Conlaoch (q.12d), Fionn's banner Deó-gréine (q.13b) - appearing mistaken as a personal name, and *naoi mic Smàile* (q.14d) - paralleled by a Dorn mac Smail in MacNicol's version of the Dearg.<sup>22</sup> Characters like Glais and Geamhail (q.9a) or Cruinne, Balbh and Gáire (q.10b) seem to owe their existence to the need to fill a line or provide a rhyme; Ardan (q.12b) and Aillidh (q.13b) would appear to have come in from the context of the material relating to Deirdre where these names are often given to Naoise's brothers, as in Stewart's version of the ballad *Aoidheadh Chlainn Uisnich* in the line *Naos, Aille, agus Ardan*.<sup>23</sup> Mor-lamh (q.9d), Dubh-chuimir (q.10a), Fad-lamhach (q.11b), Déud-gheal (q.12b), and Mor-ghlan (q.12c) are of rather doubtful origin since such names derived mainly from panegyric adjectival descriptions figure in the work of James Macpherson. Assuming that all the non-BDL quatrains are Kennedy's, it is evident that he imitates ballad precedent in choice and treatment of his own material, as in q.10 (Kennedy I):

*Mharbhadh an Dubh-chuimir,  
Cruinne 's Balbh is Gáire;  
Fir nan créuce calma,  
'S iad gu fal' chaidh fásail.*

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<sup>21</sup> LF p.102.

<sup>22</sup> LF p.109, q.42c.

<sup>23</sup> LF, p.27, q.27d.



Q.15, corresponding to BDL q.6, marks the return to the original ballad and represents Fionn's question regarding Osgar's conduct. Fearghus' following praise of Osgar (qq.16-18) parallels BDL qq.7-9 as far as the last couplet of this sequence where in q.18cd the BDL couplet 9cd has been replaced by a new one. The attack on Cairbre (q.19) has been reduced to one quatrain by the loss of BDL q.11 (Cairbre's attack on Osgar), leaving the equivalent of BDL q.10. Qq.20-21 represent the episode in which Osgar kills Cairbre and Art; in this BDL q.12 has dropped out and qq.20cd and 21cd are not paralleled in BDL. Q.20ab corresponds to BDL q.13cd and q.21ab to BDL q.13ab. In the manuscript of the first collection, q.20 was originally written as BDL q.13cdab, corresponding to MacMurchy q.8. The second couplet of this quatrain has been scored out and replaced by what is found as the second couplet of q.20 in LF. Since the scored-out couplet is also the beginning of the next quatrain, we are probably dealing with an error of anticipation; the generally tidy appearance of the manuscript, with its numbered quatrains and prose arguments in English, does not suggest that the couplet that replaces the scored-out one was composed on the spot to elaborate on Cairbre's death. Whatever material Kennedy himself composed was probably added to the texts he collected at a stage earlier than the manuscript of his first collection.

Qq.22-25 are not part of BDL and contain a general expression of sorrow; Kennedy has marked qq.23-25 as his own in both collections. The first three lines of q.22 have a note by one of the commentators on the second collection attached which reads 'not belonging to this or any other ancient poem.'<sup>24</sup> The first couplet of this quatrain runs *Nam biodh beachd mo sgéulsa,/ An críochaibh na Gréige* introduces material that is irrelevant and therefore likely to be an accretion, possibly composed by Kennedy. The third line contains a common ballad motif in *Bhíodh Mnathan ann gu túrsach* while the final line is again irrelevant and not quite logical: *Is fir air bheagan céille*. The writer of the note is justifiably suspicious of the quatrain.

Kennedy's version shares features with both BDL and MacMurchy in the material common to all versions; on a verbal level, the changes are in keeping with an oral mode of transmission although interference by Kennedy cannot be ruled out entirely. An extract from BDL and Kennedy I illustrates this:

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<sup>24</sup> R. Black, in the Draft Cat. (loc.cit.), identifies the hands of Donald Mackintosh, Rev. James Macdonald and Dr Donald Smith in the various notes added to Kennedy's second collection.

q. BDL  
 6 *Innis domh, a fhile,*  
*Mac mo mhic is m' anam:*  
*Cionnas do bhí Osgar*  
*[A'] sgoltadh na gcathbharr?*

7 *Bu dheacair a innis,*  
*Do bu mhór an obair,*  
*Na roibh marbh san gcath-sain*  
*Thuit lé armaibh Osgair.*

q. Kennedy I  
 15 *Cho 'n ionann sa deireamsa,*  
*Ach mac mo mhic is manam;*  
*Cionnas a bha Oscar*  
*A sgoltadh a chatha?*

16 *Gur deacair sin r' a innse,*  
*Le ro mhead na h-obair;*  
*Na thuit sa chath gun áireamh,*  
*Le armaibh 's lámhaibh Oscair.*

There are differences between the texts in Kennedy's first and second collections; these are likely to have been implemented by Kennedy in the course of copying. In the present text, they are limited to Kennedy's own material with the exception of qq.4 and 20ab. Q.4, compared with MacMurchy's q.3 (from Turner) shows the extent of Kennedy's changes in his two collections:

Kennedy I  
*'S cha bheó a bhrathair eile,*  
*Aon laoch fial nan gaisgeach;*  
*'S ann leis a choran calma,<sup>25</sup>*  
*A thorchair am fear sin.*

Kennedy II  
*Cho bheo a bhrathair eile,*  
*Aon laoch fial nan creach bheann;*  
*'S ann le Mungan calma,*  
*A mharbhadh am fear sin.*

MacMurchy/Turner  
*Is thuit do Sharmhac oile*  
*Lanlaoch mor na Nastal*  
*Is leis an chaisiol Fhrancach*  
*Do mharbhadh an fearsin.*

Although Kennedy's first collection bears his name and the gathering of material from oral tradition in Argyll and Lochaber was his work, while he was between 12 and 20 years of age, it is not in his hand as the second collection is.<sup>26</sup> Kennedy claims explicitly that additional material was composed exclusively by

<sup>25</sup> In the manuscript, *calma* replaces *fhrangaich* which has been scored out. *Le Mungan calma* appears in superscript above *leis a Choran calma*.

<sup>26</sup> R. Black (Draft Cat. loc. cit.) suggests that the first collection was written for Kennedy by his father. The following information about the background and history of the Kennedy manuscripts is derived from the Draft Cat. as well.

himself, and we have to take his word for it in the absence of any other evidence, but in view of Kennedy's age, at least during the early stages of his collecting activity, it is difficult not to wonder whether the scribe of the first collection did not play a greater role than just that of copyist. That the two surviving manuscripts do not contain Kennedy's original field notes is abundantly clear from their appearance and from the following piece of evidence provided by Archibald Fletcher in 1798 which contains a tantalising reference to other manuscripts and what may have been Kennedy's field notes:

'He has shown me Two large Manuscripts and several small ones, along with a heap of loose and detached Sheets in an ill state, and ill wrote, as Drawn out on Hills, Shielings, Shores, Peatmosses and Barns etc. which he never was at the pains to transcribe or publish, on account (he says) he could not pretend to become an Author for want of Good Education, nor make them compare literally with the translations of Mr McPherson nor Dr. Smith's: altho' he has many Poems and Passages that will (in part) compare with both.'

Kennedy's collecting tours ended in 1783 although the first collection was in existence by 1778, when the Rev. Dr. John Smith (of *Sean dána* fame) borrowed the manuscript. It follows that the additional material composed by Kennedy and contained in the first collection must have been added to his collected material in or before 1778, when Kennedy was at most fifteen years old. It was only in 1806 that the Highland Society, having obtained the two manuscripts in December 1801, arranged for Kennedy to mark his own material. This leaves a gap of at least 28 years between the writing of the first collection and the marking of Kennedy's own quatrains, and a gap of at least twenty years in the case of the second collection since this was in existence prior to 1785. Kennedy's memory of what he did or did not compose may not have been entirely accurate in 1806, and he may well have left out quatrains that were his by right or claimed others that are paralleled in other versions of ballads in other collections.<sup>27</sup> Kennedy's own material is easier to identify in the second collection where it is marked by inverted commas in red ink while in the first collection it is often indicated by the formula 'Kennedy claims this (and the following ... verses).' Inverted commas are not in red ink and more often than not ambiguous since direct speech is marked in the same way. Various other markers in the first collection may not even have been put in by Kennedy himself or may not refer to

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<sup>27</sup> I have identified examples of the latter case in his versions of Assaroe and the Dearg.

material composed by him. A 'grey area' of potentially doubtful material remains between Kennedy's own quatrains and those paralleled in other versions of ballads. In the present text, this extends to qq.5, 6cd, 7-9, 18cd, 20cd, 21cd, and 22. It is remarkable, however, that the surviving BDL quatrains, except for BDL q.14 which here appears in initial instead of final position, follow their BDL order and that more BDL material is represented here than in the MacMurchy texts which are c.30 years older. While qq.4, 20 and 21 can be seen to provide an explicit link with MacMurchy, Kennedy's version can be argued to represent a strand of tradition which is in a better state of preservation than MacMurchy's.

### Section c: the Scottish Variant

The continuity of tradition evidenced by extant versions of *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* and *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis* is only one facet of Scottish *Cath Gabhra* traditions. The sixteen extant complete or near-complete texts of the Scottish Variant, divided into three distinct types, indicate that this set of texts enjoyed considerable popularity. Eighteenth and nineteenth century material forms the corpus of this core text, with the most complete versions usually dating to the eighteenth century.

The metre of the Scottish variant imitated *deibhidhe* although it appears from the extant texts that this was treated very loosely; there is a high incidence of couplets where end-rhyme is either absent or defective, and hypermetric lines are frequent. While these are developments that may have come about in an oral environment, and a number of them undoubtedly have been affected in that way, it is also possible to interpret them differently. They are equally, if not more, likely to indicate a late origin for the ballad, perhaps later than BDL, in a literary environment that was more open to vernacular influences than the environment which created ballads with an older pedigree. The language appears to be less conservative than in *Mór anocht...* and the Scottish Variant is characterised by a much stronger emphasis on a complete and coherent plot.<sup>28</sup> Other features which would argue for a late genesis of the ballad are the presence of the raven and the fairy washerwoman in the introductory passage of *Chan abair mi mo thriath ri m' cheòl*, harbingers of

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<sup>28</sup> The differences in plot between this and the other core texts have been summarised in chapter 4, section c, sub-section: Core texts and ancillary texts.

impending disaster in popular tradition but rare in a ballad context. There are several passages that show parallel construction which may well be designed as a mnemonic device to aid recitation. There is no mention of St. Patrick in the ballad, eliminating a potential distraction from the plot, although the narrator is Oisean as expected from the example of other *Cath Gabhra* texts.

The plot of the Scottish Variant is based on the usual outline: a quarrel develops between Cairbre and the *Fian* during Fionn's absence and in the ensuing battle Osgar kills Cairbre and Art but is himself mortally wounded by the king. Fionn returns, speaks to his grandson and laments his death which is implied rather than stated explicitly in this ballad. The elaboration of this basic plot in detail is, however, different from any other core text and makes the Scottish Variant independent of the others. Even where there are parallels in image and detail, as in Fionn's weeping for Osgar, there is no textual overlap. The Scottish Variant is not derived from any of the other core texts but on the contrary has provided material that was incorporated into a number of versions of *Mór anocht*....<sup>29</sup> This demonstrates the popularity which the Scottish Variant enjoyed.

### *Chan abair mi mo thriath ri m' cheòl*

The most complete type of the Scottish Variant begins *Chan abair mi mo thriath ri m' cheòl*. Eight texts are extant which can be divided into five groups. The first group contains a text from the Gillies collection of c. 1786<sup>30</sup> and another collected by Hector MacLean in 1860 in Barra from Donald MacPhie;<sup>31</sup> both texts have 64 quatrains. A version of 62 quatrains is printed in Hugh and John MacCallum's collection of 1816; the source is given as the Mull schoolmaster Domhnall Mac Aonais.<sup>32</sup> An unpublished nineteenth century text of c.27 quatrains from the Henderson collection is probably an oral descendant of a Gillies-type text but shows developments that place it in its own category.<sup>33</sup> A text of 45 quatrains, collected in 1868 by J.G. Campbell from the Tiree reciter Roderick Macfadyen forms another category by itself.<sup>34</sup> The remaining three texts form the last group and

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<sup>29</sup> See this chapter, section a: The Parallel Texts: *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*.

<sup>30</sup> Printed in *LF*; pp.191-194.

<sup>31</sup> Campbell: *PTWH* 3; pp.320-347.

<sup>32</sup> MacCallum: *An Original Collection*...; pp.154-163. Mac Aonais contributed several other items to the collection.

<sup>33</sup> Extant in GUL.MS.Gen 1090 (27) ff.45r-49r and transcribed in the Appendix, part 2, section c: the Scottish Variant.

<sup>34</sup> Campbell: *The Fians*; pp.39-44.



include a version collected by Jerome Stone in c.1750 (41 quatrains),<sup>35</sup> Ewan MacDiarmid's version from a manuscript written between 1762 and 1765 (39 quatrains),<sup>36</sup> and a text collected by Matthew Young in 1784 (40 quatrains).<sup>37</sup>

Gillies' (A) and MacPhie's texts of *Chan abair*...

The Gillies text (G.A) has been used as the 'standard' version of this type since it is the longest extant one.<sup>38</sup> Donald MacPhie's version is a direct descendant of Gillies A because of their striking agreement on a verbal and structural level.<sup>39</sup> There are also several changes which indicate that MacPhie's text went through a succession of oral stages as well; these changes consist of loss of couplets, acquisition of new material, and differences in order of quatrains. A single line (G.A q.4a) has been lost in q.4.

In the dialogue of challenge between Osgar and Cairbre (qq.23-26, G.A qq.23-27), the equivalent to G.A qq.23cd and 24ab has dropped out so that q.23 now consists of G.A qq.23ab and 24cd; q.24cd is accidentally repeated as q.26cd as well where G.A repeats the second couplet of the preceding quatrain (G.A qq.26 and 27). In the general battle description (qq.29-30, G.A qq.30-32), the loss of G.A qq. 30cd and 31ab has created a new q.29 consisting of G.A qq.30ab and 31cd. In the list of Osgar's victims (qq.31-38, G.A qq.33-40), G.A q.35 has dropped out while q.35, supplied from Patrick Smith's version, has no equivalent in G.A. The order of the G.A quatrains in this passage is 33, 37, 38, 36, 34, 35, and 40. Two new couplets have been inserted in the middle of the equivalent to G.A q.55 in the dialogue between Osgar and Fionn (qq.49-54, G.A qq.51-55) so that qq.53ab and 54cd are now divided by qq.53cd and 54ab which fit the context perfectly, suggesting that their omission in G.A may well be accidental. In the episode of Fionn's lament (qq.55-60, G.A qq.56-60), q.60 - the 'Conan-quatrain' - has no parallel in G.A but is likely to have come in from a different version of the same type since it is also present in Macfadyen. The order of the G.A quatrains is 56, 57, 60, 59, and 58.

The instances of changed order of quatrains occur in passages which do not require a particular sequence; the list of Osgar's victims in particular is an example of

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<sup>35</sup> Edited by Donald MacKinnon in *TGSI* 14 (1887-1888); pp.358-364. Copies of this exist in NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.16, ff.56-58 and NLS.Adv.MS.73.3.1. ff.15-19.

<sup>36</sup> *LF* pp.182-182.

<sup>37</sup> Rev. M. Young: 'Ancient Gaelic Poems;' pp.107-119.

<sup>38</sup> For the second Scottish Variant text in the Gillies collection (G.B), see this section, sub-section: *An cuala sibhse turus Finn* (Gillies A and Gillies B).

<sup>39</sup> A number of lines originate from the version of the South Uist reciter Patrick Smith: qq.32d, 35, and 57c (?). *PTWH* 3; pp.344-345.



strongly formulaic parallel construction in which a strict order is unnecessary. Most differences between G.A and MacPhie involve material with a strong stylistic bias towards parallel construction where accidental loss does not affect the plot. Loss and accretion takes place on the level of both quatrain and couplet, with a higher incidence of lost or acquired couplets which reflects the couplet-based nature of the underlying *deibhidhe*.

MacPhie's version as represented in PTWH gives an interesting illustration of the reciter's technique. The text begins with a prose introduction in which the reciter explains the background to the ballad; he also mentions that the narrator Oisean directed his account at St. Patrick. Throughout the ballad the reciter interrupts his performance to intersperse short prose explanations of certain aspects of the text. The first of these concerns the washerwoman dialogue in which a prose comment preceding q.6 makes an old warrior the speaker in the following quatrain and also indicates that the washerwoman was washing Osgar's clothes. The next instance of comment occurs in the second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue before q.25 in which the reciter states that Cairbre had a special place behind a rock where he would be safe from attack except for his face. After the description of how Osgar killed Cairbre in q.44 is a comment explaining how Cairbre's helmet was put on a rock so that Osgar would think he was still alive. The last comment made by the reciter refers to the well-known tradition of Fionn's healing powers and precedes q.49 of the Fionn-Osgar dialogue in which Fionn reminds Osgar how he had been healed of his wounds after the battle of Beinn Eudainn. The PTWH text also indicates the respective speakers in the ballad although this may be the result of J.F. Campbell's editorial activity, as is the numbering of the quatrains. The distinction between Fionn's lament and Oisean's lament as separate episodes is to some extent redundant as few versions make it clear who laments Osgar in the respective episodes. Oisean is implied in certain instances as the speaker while in other cases Fionn is implied but there is no need for an explicit identification. As a consequence, these two and the preceding episode of dialogue between Fionn and Osgar show a considerable degree of variation in the order of quatrains as they need not appear in a certain order.

#### The MacCallum text of *Chan abair...*

J.F. Campbell comments on this text in his copy of the MacCallum collection as follows:<sup>40</sup> 'This varies a good deal from the traditional version of 1860 & 1786. It

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<sup>40</sup> NLS.Cam.1.d.29; p.155.

seems as if the collector had tried to make it reasonable.' It is likely that he refers to the Gillies collection and MacPhie's text but the textual variation is not as great as Campbell indicates.

A certain amount of loss has taken place but on the whole there is considerable verbal agreement between Gillies and MacCallum as well as agreement in order of quatrains. The losses involve the raven-episode (G.A qq.3-4) and the abbreviated washerwoman-dialogue which lacks G.A qq.5, 6, and 9. In the dialogue between Cairbre and Osgar, G.A q.27 has no equivalent and in the list of Osgar's victims, G.A qq.36 and 40 have dropped out. Some alteration has taken place in the general battle description in the equivalents to G.A qq.30-32 where the second couplet of q.24, corresponding to G.A q.30, differs. G.A q.31 has been split up and supplemented by two new couplets which each follow the G.A material (qq.25 and 26). Of these, q.24cd is strongly reminiscent of Macpherson's work although the other new couplets are reasonable imitations of the ballads in idiom and metre. Qq.40-44 constitute a new sequence which is positioned between Osgar's last deed and his speech prior to Fionn's arrival. Qq.42 and 43 are intruders from a version of *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis* and correspond approximately to qq.1 and 2cd3ab of the BDL text. The remaining three quatrains are again in the style of Macpherson. Qq.41 and 42 form a dialogue between an unidentified character and Osgar in which Osgar is admonished to rise to confront the approaching host of Lochlann; in reply he asks to be supported by his spear so that the sight of the hero standing up will scare the attackers away. A theoretical threat of invasion is discussed by Patrick and Oisean in a dialogue passage in *Mór anocht...* (e.g. in BDL qq.13-14) but this refers explicitly to a time after Osgar's death. There is no textual relationship. Q.44, addressing Fionn and presumably put into Fearghus' mouth, expresses the speaker's sorrow at the outcome of events. It is possible that the present passage was put in to heighten the dramatic impact of the events described and to emphasise the loss that Osgar's eventual death inflicted on the *Fian*.

Campbell's concluding verdict on the text states the following:<sup>41</sup> 'This is a little altered but with so little skill that it is easy to see the mending and making.' It is likely that he refers to the passages imitating Macpherson and a few other instances where there are obvious deviations from tradition, for instance the introduction of a threat posed by the king of Lochlann and his invading host first mentioned in the washerwoman-dialogue (qq.3-4). This sits uneasily with the following quatrain where Cairbre is blamed for initiating the disaster by usurping Ireland. It is possible that

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.163.

such passages were inserted by someone who wished to bring the text closer to Macpherson's work, perhaps the Mull schoolmaster who contributed the text. There is no information stating whether he was the reciter or not and where and how he acquired his text. The fact that much of the version is very close to Gillies, particularly in sequence of quatrains, might be seen to indicate that the MacCallum text is an adapted version derived directly from Gillies but the occasional verbal divergence, which is in keeping with a context of oral transmission, would appear to argue against this. The insertion of a sequence from *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis* may support the suggestion that this is a version collected from oral tradition which descends from a text that was very close to Gillies. A derivation from the Gillies collection itself, rather than from a shared source, is not impossible since twenty-seven years lie between the appearance of Gillies and the publication of the MacCallum collection.

#### Henderson's version of *Chan abair*...

Although undated, unprovenanced and lacking any information about the reciter, George Henderson's text would seem to be an orally collected text since it contains explanatory comments in colloquial prose much in the same way as MacPhie. Like the other texts in the manuscript, this is a fair copy made by Henderson from some other unidentified source, other texts were collected from a number of South Uist and Eriskay sources so that the present text may belong to this area as well. It is possible that Fr. Allan Macdonald, a noted collector of traditional material, was involved in the collecting activity that yielded this version.<sup>42</sup> A version of the Dearg Fr. Allan collected in Eriskay is descended from the MacCallum collection's Dearg<sup>43</sup> and since Henderson's text is also derived from this book both may have come from the same source. Henderson's ballad has suffered from extensive loss of episodes, quatrains, couplets and lines. There are also examples of transposed quatrains and accretion of material. As an orally collected text, it serves as a reminder that the excellent state of preservation of the Gillies A-derived version collected from Donald MacPhie is by no means typical. Several nineteenth century fragments of the Scottish Variant, collected from oral tradition, are extant, some of which are too

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<sup>42</sup> I am grateful to Ronald Black for suggesting this possible link.

<sup>43</sup> In C.-W.263. Fr. Allan's unpublished papers contain other ballads collected from South Uist and Eriskay tradition.

short to be assigned to any of the identifiable types of the Scottish Variant.<sup>44</sup> Henderson's abridged version bridges the gap between these fragments and MacPhie.

Regarding the structure of this text, it begins with the episode in which the usurper Cairbre invites the *Fian* to Tara to a feast (MacCallum qq.7-9ab, here qq.1-3, 3 being a couplet) lacking M. qq.1-6. In the first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (M. qq.10-16, here qq.4-10) has lost M. q.12ab. A new line appears in the three-line unit 6 to compensate for the lost couplet; perhaps another compensatory line existed at some point but did not survive. 6cd is a re-worked version of M. q.12cd. The non-dialogue quatrain (M. q.17) has been shortened to the couplet 11 by the loss of M. q.17ab. Then follows a large gap caused by the loss of three episodes (M qq.18-30): the second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue, the night before the battle and the general battle description. The list of Osgar's victims (M. qq.28-33) has been severely shortened by the loss of all M. quatrains except M. q.31, here paralleled by q.12. The combat between Cairbre and Osgar (M. qq.34-35, here qq.13-15) has acquired the three-line unit 15 to form a connection to Art's death; this new unit fulfils an elaborative rather than a compensatory function. Only line a of M. q.35 is represented in q.14, line b is re-worked, and the second couplet echoes M.q.51ab from the Fionn-Osgar dialogue. The couplet that has become attached to the combat quatrains fits its new context since it refers to the wounds Cairbre and Osgar inflicted on each other. Art's death (M. qq.36-37) is only represented by the three-line unit 16 paralleling M.q.36; in this unit, the first couplet has been conflated into a single line. Osgar's last deed (M. qq.38-39) has dropped out altogether. The episode of Osgar's speech and Fionn's arrival fares little better since of M. qq.40-48 only M. q.45 is represented by q.25, transposed to Oisean's lament. The new context for this quatrain, which gives Osgar's request to be carried off the battlefield, is highly appropriate since it now precedes the quatrain in which the *Fian* lift Osgar up to bear him away. A re-worked couplet 17 tells of Fionn's arrival, fulfilling a compensatory rather than an elaborative function; this couplet's first line echoes M. q.48a only, while the second line has no direct parallels in the Scottish Variant. The Fionn-Osgar dialogue (M. qq.49-53, here qq.18-21) has lost M. qq.49-51 and the couplet 20 and q.21 derive from the passage that forms an accretion in MacCallum (M. qq.40-44). They tell how Osgar is urged to rise to meet the threat of invading Norsemen; Osgar replies by asking to be helped to his feet and to be propped up with his spear. There are no equivalents to MacCallum qq.40ab and 42-44. The ballad resumes its usual course with Fionn's lament (M. qq.59-62, here qq.22-23 and 27) in which M. q.57 has dropped out and the three line

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<sup>44</sup> See this chapter, section d: Short and Fragmentary Versions.

unit 27, corresponding to M. q.58 without its second line, now forms the conclusion of the ballad following Oisean's lament. M. q.55 is represented by the three-line unit 22 with the loss of line c. Oisean's lament (M. qq.59-62, here qq.24 and 26) has lost M. qq.60-61 which appear here in the order M. qq.62 and 59. The latter is represented by the three-line unit 26 in which the line *Giulaineadh e gu Solamad* (glossed *Sealmadh*), an accretion involving a place-name invented by James Macpherson, is a re-working of line c. The place name has no equivalent in MacCallum.

Despite the extensive losses in the middle of the ballad the plot still flows with considerable coherence. After the exchange of *briathran borba* in the couplet 11 follows the statement that Osgar killed three hundred of Cairbre's archers and to an audience versed in literary heroic conventions of behaviour it must have been clear that the fighting was a direct consequence of the verbal exchange between Cairbre and Osgar.

The reciter's interjections deserve some comment. Two of them, preceding qq.9 and 25, merely identify the speaker in the quatrain. The first of the three explanatory comments follows Osgar's wounding by Cairbre (q.13) and runs: *S ann a sin bha sgialtadh bhais aige. Ghabhadh e leigheas s a h-uile ait eile ach siud*. The belief that a hero can only be killed by the use of a special weapon or by wounding him in a particular way is not unknown elsewhere in Gaelic tradition; Patrick Smith's introduction to his version of the ballad has a more elaborate reference to this.<sup>45</sup> Preceding Fionn's lament (q.22), there is a comment stating that Fionn realised that Osgar was dying; Fionn is here referred to as *an Righ* although his identity is made clear in q.24 which names Fionn in the first line. The prose comment which follows the end of the ballad proper explains that with Osgar's death the *Fian* had lost the best part of their courage.

While there is considerable continuity in the verbal material between MacCallum and Henderson the variation that can develop in an oral environment is illustrated by the opening passage of the ballad:

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<sup>45</sup> See this chapter, section d, sub-section: The short versions (Patrick Smith's version and its relative) Smith's Text, from C.-W.7, is given in the Appendix, Part 2, Scottish Texts: section c: Short and Fragmentary Texts.



q. Henderson	q. MacCallum
1 <i>Fios thainig bho Chainbi Ruadh</i> <i>A dh'ionnsuidh Osgair chruaidh na Feinne</i> <i>A dhol a dh'ionnsuidh cuirm a Riogh,</i> <i>S gu faigheadh e cìs d'a reir sin.</i>	7 <i>Chuireadh le Cairbre ruadh</i> <i>Fios gu Oscar cruaidh na Feinne,</i> <i>Dol a dh'ionnsuidh cuirm an righ,</i> <i>'S gum faigheadh e cìs do reir sin.</i>
2 <i>Mar sin ghluais an t-Oscar aluinn,</i> <i>Bho nach dü dhiult e namhaid riamh;</i> <i>Agus ciad fear donn a dheirich leis,</i> <i>Gu freasgairt ga thoil s dha ghnìomh.</i>	8 <i>Ghluais, o nach do dhiult e namh,</i> <i>An t-Oscar aluin gu teach an righ,</i> <i>'S tri cheud fear treun a dh' imich leis,</i> <i>A fhreasdal d'a thoil 's d'a ghnìomh.</i>
3 <i>Fhuair sinn dram ann agus biadh,</i> <i>Cho math s a fhuair sinn roimhe riamh.</i>	9 <i>Fhuair sinn onoir, 's fhuair sinn biadh,</i> <i>Mar a fhuair sinn roimhe riamh,</i> <i>'S bha sinn gu subhach ait a steach,</i> <i>An comunn Chairbre an Teamhra.</i>

Despite the verbal changes the meaning of the passage has been preserved. There is a high degree of stability in Heroic Code material such as *Osgar cruaidh na Feinne* and *an t-Osgar aluinn*. An interesting shift has occurred in M. q.9a and the couplet 3 where the abstract concept *onoir* has been replaced by the more practical *dram* to parallel *biadh*; while the original motif contains the juxtaposition of abstract and practical heroic concepts connected with feasting Henderson's text opts for a two-part image involving concrete or practical concepts only.

#### Macfadyen's text of *Chan abair...*

Roderick Macfadyen's text is characterised by structural changes caused by loss, transposition of quatrains, and reordering of quatrain sequence. Oisean's introduction has been shortened to one quatrain by the loss of G.A q.2; the raven-dialogue (G.A qq.3-4) has lost G.A q.4 and now forms the conclusion of the ballad (q.45). The washerwoman-dialogue (G.A qq.5-9) has lost G.A qq.5, 6, and 9 and consists of qq.4-5. The episode in which the usurper Cairbre invites the *Fian* to a feast in Tara has been split into two parts: qq.2 and 3 appear transposed to a position after the introduction, and q.6 in its expected place. Of the G.A quatrains 10-14, G.A qq.10 and 11 have dropped out and of G.A q.13 only a garbled three-line version remains in q.3. The first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.15-21) consists of qq.7-11



after the loss of G.A qq.17 and 18. The narrative quatrain which links this dialogue to the next one is preserved (q.12, G.A q.22). The second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.23-27) has lost G.A qq.26 and 27 and qq.13-15 represent the remaining G.A qq.23, 25, and 24 in this order. The night before the battle (G.A qq.28-29), a non-essential episode, has dropped out entirely. G.A q.31 has dropped out of the general battle description, leaving qq.16-and 17 to represent G.A 30 and 32. The list of Osgar's victims (qq.18-22, G.A qq.33-40) appears in the order G.A qq.37(bacd), 33, 38, and 40, having lost G.A qq.34-36. The next three episodes, in which Cairbre and Osgar wound each other, Osgar kills Art, and Osgar's last deed is described (G.A qq.41-46), survive largely unchanged as qq.23-28; the stability of this sequence throughout this type may well be due to the fact that these are the core events of the ballad. In the episode of Osgar's speech and Fionn's arrival (qq.29-33, G.A qq.47-50) q. 30 has been transposed from the episode of Oisean's final lament (G.A q.61) but since it describes how the *Fian* bear Osgar away it fits well into its present context following Osgar's request to be borne away. In q.33, corresponding to G.A q.50, the second couplet has been replaced by G.A q.56cd. In the Fionn-Osgar dialogue (qq.38-42, G.A qq.51-55), G.A q.53 has dropped out and G.A q.51 has been reworked to parallel q.36, equivalent to G.A q.54; this is probably in compensation for an imperfectly remembered quatrain. The remaining G.A quatrains appear in the order '51,' 55, 54, and 52. The episode of Fionn's lament (qq.38-42, G.A qq.56-50) has lost G.A q.56ab while its second couplet appears as q.33cd of Fionn's arrival. The G.A quatrains appear in the order 58, 59, 60, and 57 and the 'Conan-quatrain' (MacPhie q.60) is found here as q. 39. Oisean's final lament (qq.43-44, G.A qq.61-64) preserves G.A qq.63 and 62 in this order but has lost G.A q.64 and transposed G.A q.61 into Osgar's speech. The garbled raven-quatrain concludes the ballad.

It is worth noting that, unlike MacPhie's version, Macfadyen's text has lost quatrains rather than couplets. The plot of the ballad is still coherent despite the structural changes described above. On a verbal level, the changes are in keeping with what would be expected in the course of oral transmission as the following example illustrates:

q. Gillies A  
 23 *Bheirin-se briathar buan,*  
     *'S e thubhairt an Cairbre ruadh,*  
     *An t-sleagh sin ata na d' laimh*  
     *Gur h-ann innte tha do luath-bhas.*

q. Macfadyen  
 13 *Briathran buan sin, briathran buan,*  
     *A bheireadh an Cairbhi ruadh:*  
     *"An t-sleagh nimhe sin ad dhòrn*  
     *'S ann uimpe bhios do luath-bhàs."*

25 Briathar eil' an aghaidh sin,  
Bheireadh an t-Oscar calma,  
Gu 'n cuireadh e sleagh nan naoi siong,  
Mu chuma' fhuilt agus eadain.

14 Briathran eile an aghaidh sin  
A bheireadh an t-Oscar calma,  
Gu'n cuireadh e sleagh nan naoi seang  
Ma choimeachd fhuilt agus fheusaig.

24 Briathar buan sin briathar buan,  
A bheireadh an Cairbre ruadh,  
Gu 'n cuireadh e sleagh nan seach siong,  
Eadar airne agus imleag.

15 Briathran buan sin, braithran buan,  
A bheireadh an Cairbhi ruadh,  
Gu'n cuireadh e sleagh nan seachd seang  
Eadar àirnean agus imleag.

If Macfadyen gave a prose introduction to the ballad, J.G. Campbell did not print it; there is only one instance of a possible explanatory interjection by the reciter in the phrase *an sin thuirt sluagh Chairbhi ri Mhac* before the episode of Art's death. Macfadyen learnt the ballad from the recitation of his father at the beginning of the nineteenth century<sup>46</sup> and thus his father's version is roughly contemporary with Gillies. Macfadyen's version can be seen as evidence that other strands of tradition existed in Gillies' Perthshire text and Macfadyen's Tìree one while MacPhie's version illustrates that a Gillies-derived version existed in an oral environment in South Uist and Barra where another text was recorded by Hector MacLean from Patrick Smith.<sup>47</sup>

#### Stone's, MacDiarmaid's, and Young's texts of *Chan abair...*

The final group of three related versions of *Chan abair mi mo thriath re m' cheòl* displays a Perthshire connection. Jerome Stone collected in the Dunkeld area in c.1750 and preserved a version of 41 quatrains. Another version of 39 quatrains was collected between 1762 and 1769 by Eobhan MacDiarmaid who appears to have been the minister of Arrochar (since 1780) and Comrie (since 1781).<sup>48</sup> The identification of the collector is almost certain since the Rev. MacDiarmaid is named Hugh in the *Fasti*, a common translation for Eobhan in Perthshire and Argyll.<sup>49</sup> No further biographical detail appears to be available but if Hugh MacDiarmaid was the

<sup>46</sup> Campbell: *The Fians*; p.31.

<sup>47</sup> The 1860 recording MacLean mentions in *PTWH* 3, p.345, does not appear to be extant but a fragmentary text recorded from Smith by Alexander Carmichael in 1869 is found in C.W.7, pp.20-22. See this chapter, section d, sub-section: The short versions (Patrick Smith's version and its relative), and Appendix, part 2, Scottish Texts: section d: Short and Fragmentary Texts.

<sup>48</sup> J.F. Campbell, in his account of the manuscript (*LF*, p.xvii), identifies him with the Rev. James MacDiarmaid of Weem although this is doubtful.

<sup>49</sup> Scott: *Fasti*; pp.263-264.

collector of the present ballad he would seem to fall into the category of collecting students of divinity who were prominent in the eighteenth century. Hugh MacDiarmaid was ordained to the Gaelic Chapel-of-ease in Glasgow in 1772 and a collection of his Gaelic sermons was published posthumously in 1804. He must have been competent in Gaelic and therefore equipped to make a collection of miscellaneous traditional material which also contains poetry with an Arrochar connection.<sup>50</sup> MacDiarmaid's link with the Arrochar area may thus predate his appointment as minister. The third version of this group was collected by the Irishman Matthew Young in 1784 and contains 40 quatrains. No precise provenance is given for Young's texts but by his own assertion he copied from manuscripts provided by the Mull minister Archibald MacArthur, a native of Glenlyon. Young also refers to the Gillies collection which has a Perthshire connection; therefore, a Perthshire link for his text is not unlikely.<sup>51</sup> MacArthur's father Robert is the source of some material in the McLagan collection. While there is no information that attributes the present text to him with certainty this possibility cannot be dismissed.<sup>52</sup>

The three texts clearly are related to the type represented by Gillies A but at the same time display characteristics which link them closely together. Stone and MacDiarmaid are the closest texts of the three and no text can be shown to be derived directly from another. It is, however, possible that Stone and MacDiarmaid derive from a common exemplar as the agreement between them includes a large number of shared non-standard spellings.<sup>53</sup> In one instance (q.5), MacDiarmaid has contracted two quatrains into one (cf. Stone qq.5-6); the other instance of difference is the loss of G.A q.40 (= Stone q.25). There is also a certain amount of minor orthographic variation but only to a degree that would be expected in a scribal context. It would thus appear that all three texts of this type came from manuscripts rather than oral performance although the texts clearly exhibit features that mark them as material with a strong oral connection.

On a structural level, all texts show shared differences which set them apart from G.A and differences that distinguish Young's version from the other two. Beginning with Oisean's introduction and the raven and the washerwoman dialogues, Stone qq.1-9 parallel G.A qq.1-9; MacDiarmaid (qq.1-8) has lost G.A q.5cd6ab and Young lacks G.A qq.4, 5cd and 6 while part of the washerwoman dialogue (qq.12-14 = G.A qq.7-9) has been transposed to the battle description. The remaining quatrain

<sup>50</sup> LF pp xvii-xviii.

<sup>51</sup> LF pp.xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>52</sup> D.S. Thomson: 'A Catalogue and Indexes of the Ossianic Ballads in the McLagan Manuscripts' in: *SGS* 8 (1958); p.183.

<sup>53</sup> As observed by MacKinnon, *TGSI* 14, pp317-318.

of the washerwoman dialogue, q.4, consists of G.A q.5ab9cd; q.4cd is also repeated as q.14cd in the displaced sequence. The episode in which the usurper Cairbre invites the *Fian* to a feast in Tara (G.A qq.10-14) has dropped out of all three versions, as has the beginning of the next episode (G.A qq.15-21, missing G.A qq.15-18), the first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue, leaving Stone qq.10-12, MacDiarmaid qq.9-11, and Young qq.5-7. Compared to G.A there is a gap of nine quatrains which contained important background information regarding the cause of the battle of Gabhair. It is tempting to speculate that this unusually large gap might indicate that this particular type of version goes back to a defective manuscript which, however, must go back to a point earlier than the manuscript from which Young's text is derived because of the differences in Young from Stone and MacDiarmaid; it is even possible that the differences in Young's version indicate an oral stage at some point.

The non-dialogue quatrain which follows the first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue in G.A (q.22) has been incorporated in the second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue in this type (Stone q.15, MacDiarmaid q.14, Young q.10); all three versions agree in having exchanged the first couplet of G.A for a new one. The second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.23-27) has lost G.A q.23 in all three versions, leaving Stone qq.13-14 and 16-17, and MacDiarmaid qq.12-13 and 15-16; Young in addition has lost G.A qq.24-25, leaving only qq.8-9. The episode describing the night before the battle (G.A qq.28-29) is lacking in all three versions. The general battle description (G.A qq.30-32) has lost G.A q.31, leaving Stone qq.18-19, MacDiarmaid qq.17-18, and Young qq.11 and 15; Young incorporates part of the washerwoman dialogue (qq.12-14) in this episode. In the list of Osgar's victims (G.A qq.33-40) all three versions have lost G.A qq.34-35 while MacDiarmaid has also lost G.A q.40. This leaves Stone qq.20-25, MacDiarmaid qq.19-23, and Young q.16-21. The episode in which Cairbre wounds Osgar and Osgar kills Cairbre (G.A qq.41-42) is represented by Stone qq.26-27, MacDiarmaid qq.24-25, and Young qq.22-23 although the second couplet of G.A q.42 has been replaced by a repetition of G.A q.25cd in all three versions. There are no structural changes to the episode in which Osgar kills Art (G.A qq.42-43 = Stone qq.28-29, MacDiarmaid qq.26-27, and Young qq.24-25). In the episode telling of Osgar's last deed (G.A qq.45-46) the first quatrain of the sequence has lost lines b and d in all three versions, leaving Stone qq.30-31, MacDiarmaid qq.28-29, and Young qq.26-27 with a defective first quatrain.<sup>54</sup> Osgar's speech and Fionn's arrival (G.A qq.47-50) have lost G.A q.48 throughout, leaving Stone qq.32-34, MacDiarmaid qq.30-32, and Young qq.28-30. The Fionn-

<sup>54</sup> This requires a renumbering of quatrains in the printed versions of Stone and MacDiarmaid both of which represent these two quatrains as six-line units. Young's text is not divided into quatrains.



Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.51-55) has undergone reordering and appears in all three versions (Stone qq.35-39, MacDiarmaid qq.33-37, and Young qq.31-35) in the order G.A qq. 54ab51cd, 52, 53, 51ab54cd, and 55. Fionn's lament (G.A qq.56-60) is only represented by Stone q.40 and MacDiarmaid q.38 after the loss of G.A qq.56, 58, 59, and 60. Young has only lost G.A qq.56, 58, and 59 but only q.37 appears in its expected place while q.39, corresponding to G.A q.57, has been transposed to Oisean's lament. None of the three versions has a quatrain corresponding to the Conan-quatrain in MacPhie (q.60) and Macfadyen (q.39). Oisean's lament (G.A qq.61-64) has lost G.A qq.61-63 in Stone and MacDiarmaid, leaving Stone q.41 and MacDiarmaid q.39. Young has lost G.A q.63 but of the remaining quatrains only qq.38 and 40 appear as expected while q.36, corresponding to G.A q.61, has been transposed to Fionn's lament.

Young's slightly later text can be seen to be closely related to Stone and MacDiarmaid. The structural changes do not affect the coherence of the plot, with the possible exception of the loss of G.A qq.10-18 which did contain important background information. On a verbal level, there is very considerable agreement within this type and a slightly higher amount of variation exists between the three texts and G.A. This is illustrated by the following example, the episode in which Osgar kills Art.

q. Gillies A

43 *Eirich Art is glac do chloidh eamh,  
Is seasamh ann aite t-athar,  
Is ma gheabh thu do dhiol saoghail,  
Saoilidh mi gur mac rath thu.*

44 *Thug e urchair eile 'n airde,  
Ar leinn gu 'm bu leoir a h-airde  
Leagadh leis aig meud a chuimseadh  
Art mac Cairbre air an ath urchair.*

q. MacDiarmaid

26 *Eirigh Art is glac do Chloidheamh,  
Is seasamh aite t-Athar,  
'S ma thig thu beo n' na cathaibh,  
Go ma Riogh rath thu air Eirinn.*

q. Stone

28 *Eirigh Art is glac do Chloidheamh  
Is seasamh aite t-Athair  
S ma thig thu beo o na Caithibh  
Go ma Riogh rath thu air Eirinn.*

29 *Thug e urchair eille nairsde  
Air linne budh leoir a hairde  
Leagadh leis le meud chuimase  
Art mac Cairbre air an ath-Urchair.*

q. Young

24 *Eirich Art is glac do chloidheamh,  
Seasabh suas an aite t' athair,  
Mu thig u beo o na cathabh  
Gu mu riogh rath u air Eirinn.*

27 Thug e urchair eile a nairsde  
 Air leinn bu leoir a hairde  
 Leagadh leis le meud a chùimeas  
 Art mac Chairbre air an ath urchair.

25 Thug e urchair eille 'nairde,  
 (Air linn fein bu leoir a h airde)  
 Leagadh leis aig mead a chuimse  
 Art mac Cairbre air an agh urchair.

The structural changes that have led to the emergence of this type appear to be greater than the verbal differences between them, reflecting the strong likelihood of a scribal context for all three.

Of all extant versions of *Chan abair...*, the five eighteenth century texts show an apparent Perthshire link and would seem to be derived from a scribal context despite the oral features present in all. Two texts with a definite oral pedigree are extant from the nineteenth century, one of which, Donald MacPhie's version, is very likely derived from G.A. The impression of relative uniformity given especially by the eighteenth century versions of *Chan abair...* is not found to the same degree in other texts belonging to the Scottish Variant.

### ***An cuala sibhse turus Finn***

Four texts beginning *An cuala sibhse turus Finn* are extant. The earliest of them, with the first line *Nuar do chualas turus Finn*, is found in a manuscript written after 1746 by the Campbeltown scribe William MacMurchy.<sup>55</sup> This incomplete version of 29 quatrains ends with the description of Osgar's last deed and is immediately followed by a version of *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis* which is introduced by a short prose passage. The combination of two *Cath Gabhra* core texts works well despite the fact that *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis* duplicates much of the subject matter of the preceding text and may be a deliberate development rather than an attempt to restore a defective Scottish Variant version.

Another text is found in the Macfarlane collection<sup>56</sup> and contains 38 quatrains. This dates to c.1760 and represents a complete version.

Two closely related texts form a group and would seem to date to the second half of the eighteenth century. One of them comes from the Gillies collection of c. 1786 (Gillies text B) and contains 32 quatrains.<sup>57</sup> A version which is almost identical to this but incomplete, having only c. 23 quatrains and ending with Gillies B q.23ab,

<sup>55</sup> Printed in *Rel.Celt.* I, pp.110-112, from NLS.Adv.MS.72.2.15.

<sup>56</sup> McLagan 9, printed in *Rel.Celt.* I, pp.283-286.

<sup>57</sup> LF, pp.193-194.. J.F. Campbell's note 'This version is so broken that it cannot easily be divided into verses' should not be taken at face value although there are several incomplete quatrains.



is found in NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.16. This is preceded by a note from the collector and scribe of the piece, the Rev. John MacKinnon of Glendaruel,<sup>58</sup> which runs:

A Fragment of an Ancient Poem call'd the Death of Oscar. Communicated by a recruit belonging to the 42nd who had not a word of english. It seems only to be an imitation of Ossian; In some parts of it, the language is good, and differs greatly from the present style of Lochaber, where this poem is very common. I have copies of it from several hands, but I think this the best. And 'am convinc'd that the poem is some centuries old.

While this text is authenticated as an oral version by the note there is also an allusion to the existence of apparently related texts in a scribal context of which Gillies B may also be a representative. MacKinnon was chaplain to the Argyllshire Highlanders, probably prior to 1778, when he was ordained to the parish of Kilfinan.<sup>59</sup> It is probable that he collected his text during his time as military chaplain since he recorded his text from a recruit but does not mention his informant's place of origin. His comparison with Lochaber texts is intriguing but since none appear to be extant this statement cannot be verified. The remarkable similarity of this text and Gillies B, however, may be taken to argue in favour of a Perthshire or Argyll provenance; it is also important to remember that MacKinnon had strong Argyll links himself as a native of Kilmorie and later minister of Kilfinan and Glendaruel.

*An cuala...* is closely related to *Chan abair mi mo thriath re m' cheòl* where the ballad proper begins with this line after Oisean's introduction and the raven and washerwoman dialogues (qq.1-9 in Gillies A). The introduction and the two dialogues are, strictly speaking, redundant since they merely serve to set the scene and create an atmosphere of impending disaster. The first quatrain of *An cuala...* then sets the scene again by referring to Fionn's absence and stating that Cairbre usurped Ireland. It is thus conceivable that the introductory passages of *Chan abair...* are an elaboration which was not part of a hypothetical 'original' text of the Scottish Variant. It is likely, however, that this 'original' was closer to *Chan abair...* than to *An cuala...* since versions of *Chan abair...* generally present their plot in greater elaboration and with more agreement in detail between versions.

Comparing *An cuala...* with the versions of texts of the Scottish Variant represented by Gillies A, different patterns of loss, both of whole episodes and of

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<sup>58</sup> As identified by R.I. Black in the description of the manuscript in the *Draft Cat.* For the text, see Appendix, part 2, Scottish Texts: section d: Short and Fragmentary Texts.

<sup>59</sup> For biographical details see Scott: *Fasti*, vol 4; p.32.

quatrains, couplets and lines, and accretion become obvious. There are also some instances of transposed material.

#### Macfarlane's text of *An cuala...*

Beginning with the longest extant text of *An cuala...*, Macfarlane, the first episode, in which Cairbre invites the *Fian* to Tara to a feast (G.A qq.10-14) here contains five quatrains of which qq.2, 3, 4ab and 5cd have no equivalent in G.A; G.A qq. 11-13 have been lost. The new quatrains would seem to fulfil a compensatory function to make good the loss of the G.A quatrains. In the first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.15-21, here qq.6-18), G.A q.17 has dropped out. Q.12 (G.A q.22) represents the non-dialogue quatrain which separates the two Cairbre-Osgar dialogues. The second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.23-27) is found as qq.13-14 after the loss of G.A qq.24-26. The episode telling of the night before the battle (G.A qq.28-29) has dropped out. Of the general battle description (G.A qq.30-32), only G.A q.31 survives as q.15. In the list of Osgar's victims (G.A qq.33-40), G.A qq.34 and 36 have dropped out while the rest (qq.16-21) appear in the order G.A qq.35, 37, 38, 33, 39 and 40. The combat between Cairbre and Osgar (G.A qq.41-42) is preserved in full as qq.22-23. The episodes describing Art's death (G.A qq.43-44) and Osgar's last deed (G.A qq.45-46) have here been conflated into one (qq.24-26), having lost G.A qq.44ab, 45cd and 46ab which is replaced by a new q.26ab to compensate. While all four versions of *An cuala...* conflate these two episodes, the loss of G.A material differs considerably in Macfarlane and G.B. Osgar's last speech and Fionn's arrival (G.A qq.47-50) has dropped out altogether. The Fionn-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.51-55) is preceded by two displaced quatrains from Fionn's lament (G.A qq.56abdc and 57, here qq.27 and 28); the dialogue itself consists of qq.29-31 but has lost G.A qq.54-55. Fionn's lament (G.A qq.56-60) has undergone further fragmentation into qq.32-33, representing G.A q.58 and a quatrain corresponding to MacPhie's Conan-quatrain, and qq.36-37, representing G.A qq.60 and 59. Oisean's lament (G.A qq.60-64) has lost G.A q.64 and appears as qq.34-35 and q.38. Since Macfarlane's version does not identify the speakers in the two final episodes their fragmentation does not impair the sense of the passage. The other structural changes do not affect the logic or coherence of the plot.

MacMurchy's incomplete version shows some overlap with Macfarlane on a structural level although on the whole this text is the furthest removed from G.A and the other versions of *An cuala...* In Cairbre's invitation (G.A qq.10-14, here qq.1-6), G.A qq.11-13 have been lost as in Macfarlane but here qq.2, 3, 4, and 5 have no G.A equivalents and only qq.1 and 6 have parallels in Macfarlane qq.1, 4cd, and 5cd. The first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.15-21, here qq.7-12) has lost G.A qq.17 and 18 while the couplet 9 is not found in G.A or Macfarlane. The non-dialogue quatrain (G.A q.22) forms q.15 and follows the second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue; its last couplet is new and replaces the first couplet of the G.A quatrain. The second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (qq.13-14) has been abbreviated in the same way as Macfarlane, and the episode telling of the night before the battle has been lost as well (G.A qq.23-29). The general battle description (G.A qq.30-32, here qq.16-17) has only lost G.A q.32. The list of Osgar's victims (G.A qq.33-40, here qq.18-24) has lost G.A qq.35-37 while qq.18 and 21 have no G.A parallels. The order of the remaining G.A quatrains is qq.33, 38, 39, 34, and 40. The combat between Cairbre and Osgar (G.A qq.41-42) is preserved in qq.25-26 while Art's death and Osgar's last deed (G.A qq.43-46) are again conflated into qq.27-29, in the same way as in Macfarlane except that in q.28cd the order of lines has been reversed. MacMurchy's version ends here and the prose introduction to his version of *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis* follows.

While Gillies A and Macfarlane show a generally high amount of verbal agreement, MacMurchy's text is usually further removed, as the following example illustrates:

q.	G.A	q.	Macfarlane
15	<i>An la mu dheireadh d' an òl, Thuirte Cairbre le guth mor, Iomlaid ceinn sleagha b' ail leam uait, Oscar dhuinn na h-Albhainn.</i>	6	<i>An oi'che mu dheire do 'n òl Thuirte an Cairble le guth mòr, Iomlaid cinn sleadhach an dràst, A b' aill leam fhaithinn uaitse Osgair.</i>
16	<i>Creud an iomlaid ceinn a bhiodh ort, A Chairbre ruaidh na 'n Long-phort? 'S tric bu leat mi fein 's mo shleagh, Ann latha catha agus comhraig.</i>	7	<i>Ciod an iomlaid cinn sleadh a tha ort A Chairble mhòir nan lonng phort? 'S gum bu leat mi fhein, 's mo shleadh Ann àm chuir catha, na còmhrag.</i>

q. MacMurchy  
 7 *An ceathramh lae dhuinn san ol*  
*Labhair Cairbre le guth mor,*  
*Iomlad sleadh is aill leam uait,*  
*Oscuir na narm faebhair cruaidh.*

8 *Cred e an tiomladh sleagh ta ort,*  
*A Cairbre ruaidh na nlot?*  
*S gur bu leat mi féin smo shleadh*  
*Re ham cath is comhrac.*

### Gillies A and Gillies B

The two texts of the Scottish Variant in the Gillies collection are related to each other. G.B and its companion, NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.16. which is so similar that it could be a copy of G.B,<sup>60</sup> are quite close to G.A although in less perfect condition as the examples of textual loss involving one episode, a number of quatrains and also couplets and lines imply. The possibility that Gillies A was worked up to its present shape from something closer to the other extant versions of both *Chan abair mi mo thriath re m' cheòl* and *An cuala sibhse turus Finn* is ruled out by the different patterns of textual loss that are evident in the extant versions of the Scottish Variant.

In Cairbre's invitation to the *Fian* (G.A qq.10-14, here qq.1-3), G.A q.14 has dropped out and q.2, paralleled by Macfarlane q.2 but not in G.A, has lost its initial couplet.<sup>61</sup> This episode is followed by half of the non-dialogue quatrain (G.A q.22cd, here q.6) which has been transposed from its usual position between the two Cairbre-Osgar dialogues; the remaining half of this quatrain appears as the couplet 12, corresponding to G.A q.22ab, in its usual position. In the first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.15-21, here qq.7-11), G.A q.15ab, replaced by a new compensatory couplet (q.7cd), 17 and 18 have been lost while the second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.32-27) is only represented by q.13 after the loss of G.A qq.24-27. Of the episode telling of the night before the battle (G.A qq.28-29) only G.A q.29 is represented by q.14. The general battle description (G.A qq.30-32) has dropped out. The list of Osgar's victims (G.A qq.33-40) has been reduced to q.15 after the loss of G.A qq.33-

<sup>60</sup> It is unlikely to have been the source of Gillies B since some lines and the end are missing. Although the dating of NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.16. is uncertain but likely to be earlier than the publication of the Gillies collection the closeness of the two versions is inexplicable and apt to provoke suspicion.

<sup>61</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.16. has also lost the last line of this quatrain.

39. The combat between Cairbre and Osgar (G.A qq.41-42) is preserved in qq.16-17 although Art's death and Osgar's last deed (G.A qq.43-46) are conflated into qq.18-19 after the loss of G.A q.43cd (replaced by a new compensatory couplet 18cd), 45, and 46ab. Of Osgar's speech and Fionn's arrival (G.A qq.47-50) only G.A q.48 survives as q.20. This is followed by a transposed part of Fionn's lament, qq.21-22, corresponding to G.A qq.56-57). The Fionn-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.51-55, here qq.23-26) has lost G.A qq.52ab and 54 and the couplet 25 represents G.A q.52cd. Then follows the rest of Fionn's lament (G.A qq.58-60) in qq.27-30 which include the Conan-quatrain also found in Macfarlane (q.33) as q.28. The text concludes with Oisean's lament in qq.31-32, corresponding to G.A qq.61-62 with the loss of G.A qq.63-64.<sup>62</sup>

On a verbal level, G.A and G.B are quite close although occasionally some variation is present, as in the following example from the episodes of Art's death and Osgar's last deed:

q.	Gillies A	q.	Gillies B
43	<i>Eirich Art is glac do chloidh eamh, Is seasamh ann aite t-athar, Is ma gheabh thu do dhiol saoghail, Saoilidh mi gur mac righ thu.</i>	18	<i>Art mhic Carbhair glac do chlaimh, 'S dean seasamh an aite t-Athar, 'S mar dean an 't eug do thoirt Diol mo bhas le meud do ratha.</i>
44	<i>Thug e urchair eile 'n airde, Ar leinne gu 'm bu leoir a h-airde Leagadh leis aig meud a chuimseadh Art mac Cairbre an ath urchair.</i>	19	<i>Thuit le Osgar gnìomh nach cuimseach Art mac Chairbhair air 'n ath urchair,</i>
45	<i>Chuir iad chum an Rìgh mu cheap, Sluagh Chairbre bu gharbh gleac, Los gu 'm buidh' nte leo buaidh laraich, Air faicin doibh Oscair gu craiteach.</i>		
46	<i>Thog e leacog chonart chruaidh, Bharr na talmhainn taobh-ruaidh, Bhris e 'n Cath-bharra mu 'n cheap, Gnìomh mu dheireadh mo dheadh mhic.</i>	19	<i>Sgar è dheth an clogaide, 's an ceann, Be gnìomh mu dheirre mo dheagh-mhic.</i>

<sup>62</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.16, ending with G.B q.23ab, follows G.B in transposing qq.21 and 22 of Fionn's lament but with the loss of q.22a.



As with Macfarlane and MacMurchy, G.B still presents a logical and coherent plot. The extant versions of *An cuala...* may all have an oral background although only NLS.Adv.MS.73.2.16. explicitly refers to this. A trimming of episodes with a strong repetitive element or parallel structure of quatrains is evident in all versions, involving, for instance, the Cairbre-Osgar dialogues and the list of Osgar's victims. A similar situation applies at the end of the ballad in the passages of monologue and dialogue where action takes a role subordinate to expression of grief at Osgar's impending death. New material appears to be mostly limited to the beginning of the ballad, particularly in Macfarlane and MacMurchy. Only the combat between Cairbre and Osgar survives intact in all four versions, probably because this is the key event of the ballad.

Looking briefly at the place-name material in the Scottish Variant, a slight uncertainty as to Scottish or Irish provenance is beginning to creep in. MacMurchy still has *Almhuinn* throughout his version while *Albuinn* is used in Macfarlane (cf. q.14b *Thuirt an t Oscar donn a Albuinn*) although Cairbre is consistently referred to as *Rìgh Èirionn*. G.B repeats the mistake<sup>63</sup> in q.7b and even begins the text with the statement *An cuala sibhse truas fhinn,/ 'N uair a ghluais è gu h-innse Eirionn* which is incongruous since Cairbre takes possession of Ireland in the last line of this quatrain. An Irish location is implied by the place-name material in the rest of this version. As Macfarlane and G.B post-date James Macpherson and his advocacy of a Scottish provenance of Fionn and his contemporaries it would be only too easy to assume that his influence prompted the appearance of Scotland instead of *Almhuinn*. It is, however, equally or more likely that current eighteenth century tradition included such mistaken references before Macpherson's time since it is not too difficult to confuse *Albainn* and *Almhuinn* in an oral or a scribal context, especially when considering the scribal variant *Albhuinn* which is occasionally found even in Irish manuscripts. On the whole, *An cuala...* and other Scottish Variant texts may occasionally lapse in the case of *Albainn versus Almhuinn* although on the whole the Irish affinities of the protagonists are clearly represented in the place-names.

Generally, *An cuala...* seems to be more closely linked to an oral context than *Chan abair mi mo thriath re m' cheòl* with its stronger scribal background in the patterns of textual loss and accretion that have emerged.

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<sup>63</sup> Gillies A q.15d *Oscair dhuinn na h-Albhainn* would seem to attempt a compromise.

Five complete texts beginning with the line *'S muladach mi an dèidh Chaoilte* are extant; again, they are related to *Chan abair mi mo thriath re m' cheòl* but also show distinctive features that set them apart from other types of the Scottish Variant.<sup>64</sup> The earliest text, of 44 quatrains, dates to c.1755 and is found in the MacNicol collection. To facilitate comparison with other texts, it has been necessary to divide MacNicol's six-line units into separate quatrains and two-line units; the numbering of quatrains is thus slightly different from the printed text. Since the Rev. Donald MacNicol made his collection before he became minister of Saddell and Skipness in 1763 it is possible that he collected his material in his native Glenorchy.<sup>65</sup> A unpublished copy in which MacNicol's often erratic orthography was normalised exists in the McLagan collection.<sup>66</sup> A curious change was implemented by McLagan in replacing MacNicol's *Hallabhi* (for *Almhuinn*) with *Hallabi* (presumably intended to mean *Albainn*); MacNicol only lapses once in the final line of his text where he gives the form *an Albin*.

A version of 41 quatrains was collected by the Rev. Dr. Irvine of Little Dunkeld between 1800 and 1808 from the recitation of a certain MacIntyre in Glenlyon.<sup>67</sup> The six-line unit 8 has been split up into a two-line unit and a quatrain for ease of reference; following quatrains have to be re-numbered.

The shortest text, with 31 quatrains, is extant in a collection of ballads associated with John Smith of Campbeltown and dates to the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>68</sup> No information regarding its reciter or provenance seems to be available; it is immediately followed in the manuscript by a copy of Stone's version of *Chan abair....*

Duncan Kennedy's two texts, of 145 quatrains each, date to the period between 1774 and 1783 and are the result of Kennedy's collecting in various parts of the Highlands.<sup>69</sup> Kennedy's texts are problematic in that they contain material not paralleled in any other extant version as well as material composed and marked as

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<sup>64</sup> A fragment is discussed in this chapter, section d, introductory paragraph.

<sup>65</sup> Rev. Dr R. MacLeod: *Mo Shùil ad Dhèidh: The Story of an Eighteenth Century Romance* in *TGSI* LVII (1990-1992); p. 116. MacNicol's text is printed in *LF* pp.183-185.

<sup>66</sup> GU.MS.Gen.1042, no.234, ff.1-4.

<sup>67</sup> *LF* pp.194-195.

<sup>68</sup> NLS.Adv.MS.73.3.1. ff.13-15, transcribed in the Appendix, part 2, Scottish Texts: section b: Scottish Variant Texts.

<sup>69</sup> *LF* pp.185-191. For Kennedy's editorial methods, see this chapter, section b: *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis*.

such by Kennedy himself. As with Kennedy's version of *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis*, his evidence regarding his own passages appears to be to some extent unreliable.

The relationship of these five texts with G.A is similar to the one that exists between G.A and *An cuala*.... Two introductory quatrains of lament for Caoilte, perhaps an example of elaborative innovation or an accretion from elsewhere since Caoilte does not appear in the Scottish Variant,<sup>70</sup> precede a quatrain which links up to G.A q.10 and the initial quatrain of *An cuala*...; after that, distinctive patterns of loss, accretion, and transposition can be observed. There is also occasional textual and structural overlap with *An cuala*..., particular Macfarlane's version.

The introductory episode of MacNicol's text (qq.1-7) begins with the two Caoilte-quatrains and then follows Macfarlane qq.1-5; after the loss of Macfarlane q.1ab the couplet 3 corresponds to Macfarlane q.1cd while 7 is a couplet representing Macfarlane q.5ab. In the first couplet of q.6, corresponding to Macfarlane q.4, the order of lines has been reversed. Of the Gillies A material (G.A qq.10-14) only G.A q.10cd is represented in the couplet 3 and G.A q.14 in qq.6cd and 7ab.<sup>71</sup> The first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.15-21, here qq.8-15) returns to the Gillies A type although the elaborative couplet 12 is not part of Gillies A. The non-dialogue quatrain (G.A q.22, here q.18) has been transposed to follow the second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue; the dialogue itself (G.A qq.23-27, here qq.16-17) has lost G.A qq.24-26, linking up with Macfarlane regarding the lost G.A quatrains but corresponding to MacMurchy in transposing the non-dialogue quatrain. The night before the battle (G.A qq.28-29) is represented only by q.19 after the loss of G.A q. 29. In the general battle description (G.A qq.30-32, here qq.20-21) G.A q.32 has been lost. The list of Osgar's victims (G.A qq.33-40, here qq.22-28) has lost G.A q.36 and the remaining quatrains follow in the order G.A qq.35, 34, 39, 38, 33, 37, and 40. The combat between Cairbre and Osgar (G.A qq.41-42, here qq.29-30) is, as expected, preserved in full. Art's death (G.A qq.43-44, here qq.31-32) is likewise preserved although q.32cd parallels Macfarlane q.25ab rather than Gillies and q.32ab is not paralleled elsewhere. Perhaps this couplet was composed specifically to compensate for the effect of conflation along the lines of *An cuala*.... Osgar's last deed (G.A qq.45-46, here qq.33-34) follows Macfarlane (qq.25cd and 26) rather than G.A in that there is no equivalent to G.A q.45cd and in that in q.34 the initial couplet

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<sup>70</sup> He does, however, figure in *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*. Caoilte is also portrayed as one of the surviving figures of the Fian in the *Acallam*.

<sup>71</sup> MacNicol's text presents the following as six-line units: 3 + q.4, q.6 + 7, 12 + q.13, and 38 + q.39. A new numbering of quatrains has been achieved by splitting the six-line units up as appropriate according to other Scottish Variant texts.

differs from G.A q.46ab.<sup>72</sup> The episode of Osgar's speech and Fionn's arrival has dropped out altogether. The Fionn-Osgar dialogue is preceded by a transposed quatrain from Fionn's lament, q.35 corresponding to G.A q.57. In the Fionn-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.61-64, here qq.36-39), G.A qq.54-55 have dropped out as in Macfarlane and the elaborative couplet 38 is not found in Gillies A. The rest of Fionn's lament (G.A qq.56 and 58-60, here qq.40-42) has lost G.A qq.56 and 58 and q.40, fulfilling an elaborative function, is not paralleled elsewhere. The ballad concludes with Oisean's lament (G.A qq.61-64, here qq.43-44) in which the Gillies quatrains appear in the order G.A qq.60, 61, and 62 after the loss of G.A qq.63 and 64.

Despite the loss of the episode of Osgar's speech and Fionn's arrival, the ballad still has a coherent plot. The following passage from Cairbre's invitation illustrates how MacNicol's version combines textual elements that correspond to Gillies A with elements paralleled in Macfarlane:

q.	MacNicol	q.	Macfarlane
5	<i>Fhregair shinne an Curidh dana</i> <i>A lion uille do na bha shin</i> <i>Cha roibh shinne 'dfhein ann uille</i> <i>Na choisne dhuin am bith buidh</i>	3	<i>Fhreagair sinn an cuire dàna,</i> <i>A lion uile is a bha sinn,</i> <i>'S cha raibh sinn ann do 'n Fheinn uile</i> <i>A lion 'sa chosna dhuinn bhi subhach.</i>
6	<i>Air an Rathid ghle gheal chleachdich</i> <i>Oichd Fiochid deug deo Mharcich</i> <i>Huair shin Onnoir huair shin Biadh</i> <i>Mar a huair shin roidh riabh</i>	4	<i>Seachd fichead-deug deagh mharcach</i> <i>Air an rathad ghle gheal chleachdach,</i> <i>Fhuair sinn onoir, fhuair sinn miagh</i> <i>Mar a fhuair sinn roimhe riamh.</i>
7	<i>Bha sinn gu subhich a steach</i> <i>Cubhil as Cairbra san Teiridh</i>	5	<i>Chaidh sinn gu subhach a steach</i> <i>'S thainig sinn dubhach amach,</i> <i>Bha Cairble is Oscar ri trom òl</i> <i>Seachd oi'che agus seachd lò.</i>

<sup>72</sup> A space is left after MacNicol's couplet 33 in LF, perhaps indicating an awareness that there are texts which supply the missing couplet.

14 *Fhuair sinn onoir fhuair sinn biadh,  
 Mar a fhuair sinn roimhe riamh,  
 Bha sinn gu sughach as teach,  
 Maille re Cairbre san Teamhraidh.*

Irvine's text of 'S muladach mi...

Alexander Irvine's text also begins with two introductory quatrains of lament for Caoilte which do not, however, agree completely with MacNicol. MacNicol q.1cd has dropped out and q.2 has a new compensatory second couplet. There is considerable verbal variation as well in the remaining lines of these two quatrains. As in MacNicol, qq.3-6 follow Macfarlane qq.1-5 although Macfarlane qq.4cd and 5cd have dropped out. A textual link appears to exist between Irvine and MacMurchy in q.3ab which is similar, especially in the second line, to MacMurchy q.1ab. Irvine has *An sin do ghluais siubhal Fhinn,/ Gach slios bhaile bha 'n Eirin* while MacMurchy gives *Nuar do chualas turus Finn/ Ann sgach sliosbhaile bi neirinn*. In the first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.15-21, here qq.7-10), G.A qq.15ab and 16-18 have dropped out; the couplet 8, representing G.A q.15cd, is attached to q.6 to form a six-line unit, the only instance in Irvine of departure from a regular quatrain structure except for the final couplet 41.<sup>73</sup> The non-dialogue quatrain (G.A q.22, here q.11) appears in its usual place, followed by the second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.23-27, here qq.12-13) in which G.A qq.24-26 have been lost. The night before the battle (G.A qq.28-29, here q.14) is represented by the equivalent of G.A q.28 as in MacNicol. The general battle description (G.A qq.30-32, here q.15) has been abbreviated to one quatrain by the loss of G.A qq.30cd, 31ab, and 32 while q.15cd parallels Macfarlane q.15cd. In the list of Osgar's victims (G.A qq.33-40, here qq.16-20), G.A qq.36-38 have dropped out and the remaining quatrains appear in the order G.A qq.36, 34, 39, 33, and 40. The combat between Cairbre and Osgar (G.A qq.41-42, here qq.21-22) survives intact while Art's death and Osgar's last deed (G.A qq.43-46) have been conflated into qq.23-25 as in Macfarlane qq.24-26. Osgar's speech and Fionn's arrival have dropped out as in MacNicol but here G.A qq.47-50 have been replaced by a sequence in qq.26-30 which has both a compensatory and an elaborative function and which is not paralleled elsewhere. It is not possible to say when these quatrains became attached to the ballad or who composed them.

<sup>73</sup> Minor renumbering of quatrains was necessary after splitting up 8 and q.9.



Although they are reasonably competent imitations of ballad idiom and, to some extent, the *deibhidhe*-based metre they do not add any new information but replicate matters that have been touched upon elsewhere in the text. The Fionn-Osgar dialogue (G.A qq.51-55, here qq.31-33) has lost G.A qq.54-55. In Fionn's lament (G.A qq.56-60, here qq.34-37, 39cd, and 40ab) G.A q.59 has dropped out and q.17 is not found in G.A but parallels Macfarlane q.33. Q.39cd40ab, corresponding to G.A q.60, has been transposed to a position in Oisean's lament. This final episode of the ballad (G.A qq.61-64), fragmented by the transposed quatrain, consists of qq.38, 39ab, 40cd, and the concluding couplet 41, corresponding to G.A qq.61ab and 63ab after the loss of G.A qq.61cd, 62, 63cd, and 64. The remaining couplets 38ab, 39ab, and 41 are very likely to fulfil a compensatory function to make good the loss of other couplets which probably paralleled G.A material; this suggestion is supported by the fact that the three new couplets duplicate or echo the themes of the ones they supplement.

Irvine's text shows overlaps with G.A, MacNicol, and Macfarlane in structure and shared textual features but differs enough from them to be classed on its own. The fact that this is one of the few eighteenth century texts which name the reciter emphasises the importance of Irvine's, or rather his reciter MacIntyre's, version. Many others are classed as derived more or less directly from oral tradition through the benefit of doubt combined with textual evidence. It appears that on a textual level Irvine is slightly further removed from G.A than MacNicol as the following example from the second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue and the night before the battle demonstrates:

q.	Gillies A	q.	Irvine
23	<i>Bheirin-se briathar buan, 'S e thubhairt an Cairbre ruadh, An t-sleagh sin ata na d' laimh Gur h-ann innte tha do luath-bhas.</i>	12	<i>Gun tugainnse briathra gu nuadh, Arsa an Cairbre crann ruadh; An t-sleagh sin m'a bheil do lamh, Gur ann leatha bhios do luatha bhas.</i>
27	<i>Briathar eil' an aghaidh sin, Bheireadh an t-Oscar calma Gu 'n d' thugadh e sealg agus creach Do dh' Albainn an la 'r mhaireach.</i>	13	<i>Gu'n tugainse breathra eile, Arsa an Oscar donn a h-Almhi; Gu 'n togar leam sealg is creach, Gu 'n rachainn do Dh' almhi a maireach.</i>

<p>28 <i>Bha 'n oich sin duinne gu 'n chabhair,</i>  <i>Thall agus a bhos mu 'n amhainn,</i>  <i>Bha doirlinn leath mar leath</i>  <i>Bha doirlinn mhor eadar-inn.</i></p>	<p>14 <i>Oidhche a' faireach leinn gu là,</i>  <i>Mar ri mnathaibh Fhiann Co-ol;</i><sup>74</sup>  <i>Shuidhich sinn Dour leth marleth,</i><sup>75</sup>  <i>'S bha Dour eadaruinn.</i></p>
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q. MacNicol

16 *Bheir mishe dhuit Briathar buan*  
*She huirt an Cairbra Crann-ruaigh*  
*A tshleigh shin mu bheil do Laibh*  
*Gur hann innte ha do lua Bhas.*

17 *Bheir mishe dhuit Briathar eille*  
*Ars an Toscar Donn e Hallabhi*  
*Gun togbhar leom Shealg as Creach*  
*'S gun reichin do Dhallabhi marich.*

19 *Bha 'n oiche shin duinne gun Doir (Chobhir)*  
*Hauill & a bhos mun Obhin (River)*  
*Bha Doir lan leth mar leth,*  
*'S bha Doirlan mar Edaruin.*

It is apparent that in this case there is considerable agreement between MacNicol and Irvine in the first two quatrains of the passage although Irvine q.14 shows considerable variation compared with MacNicol q.19 which in turn agrees with G.A q.28.<sup>76</sup>

Smith's text of 'S muladach mi...

This text is characterised by considerable textual loss and some instances of transposition although it begins with a sequence that is clearly related to Irvine's text; q.7, however, is new. In the first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (qq.1-9), G.A qq.17cd, 18 and 21 are not represented and the loss of the couplet has left q.11 incomplete. The second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue lacks G.A qq.24-28, paralleling Irvine and MacNicol,

<sup>74</sup> Glossed *mathaibh*.

<sup>75</sup> Glossed *Doubhir*.

<sup>76</sup> Note also the structural difference in the existence of the transposed non-dialogue quatrain MacNicol q.18.

and q. 15 appears in the order bacd. The two following episodes, the night before the battle and the general battle description, have dropped out altogether. The list of Osgar's victims (qq.17-20) has lost the equivalents of G.A qq.33, 35, 36, and 39 and appears in the order G.A qq.38, 37, 34, and 40 which suggests its independence from the other texts. The episode of Art's death (q.24) has lost G.A q.44 and Osgar's last deed has been reduced to one quatrain by the loss of G.A q.45; the remaining quatrain now concludes the ballad. Nothing remains of Osgar's speech and Fionn's arrival. The dialogue between Fionn and Osgar has been reduced to the couplet 23, corresponding to G.A 53cd, and has been displaced to a position between the combat between Cairbre and Osgar and Art's death; the other G.A quatrains have been lost, Fionn's lament and Osgar's answer (qq.27-30) have lost G.A qq.59 and 60 although a new quatrain, corresponding to MacNicol q.40 and Irvine q.37, has been added. The quatrains corresponding to G.A appear in the order qq.58, 56, and 57. Oisean's lament (qq.25-26) appears in a position following Art's death.

The pattern of textual loss as well as the textual divergence in Smith's text would seem to indicate that this is a representative of a largely independent strand of tradition which derives from an oral environment, as is already indicated by the opening line *'S iomaichèistich mi n diugh Chaoilt*.

#### Kennedy's texts of *'S muladach mi...*

A more complex situation applies in the case of Duncan Kennedy's two long texts. The text from the second collection differs mostly on a verbal level from the text in the first collection. As with his version of *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis* it is likely that these changes were implemented by Kennedy himself as parallels to the changes do not appear to be extant. More difficult to evaluate is the position of Kennedy's texts with regard to other texts of *Is muladach...* since its 145 quatrains contain much material that is not paralleled elsewhere even after identification of Kennedy's own material and the version of *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis* which is incorporated in Kennedy's text.<sup>77</sup> Matters are not helped by the fact that Kennedy occasionally claims material as his own which has parallels in other versions. Kennedy's own material also has the effect of lengthening existing episodes to an extent which is unlikely to have parallels in an oral context and gives the ballad a ponderous and long-winded form.

The first episode (MacNicol 1-7), Cairbre's invitation, is here represented by qq.1-18. Because of the closer relationship between Kennedy and MacNicol and

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<sup>77</sup> See this chapter, section b: *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis*.

Irvine comparison will confine itself to these three texts. Parallel material here consists of qq.3, 5, 6ab12cd, 14, 15ab16ab, 16cd, and 18ab. New material elaborates on what is present in the parallel quatrains and consists of qq.1, 2, 4, 6cd-12cd, 13, 15cd, 17, and 18cd; the two couplets would appear to fulfil a complementary function. Of the new quatrains, qq.2 and 8-10 are marked by inverted commas which may indicate that Kennedy claimed these quatrains as his own.<sup>78</sup> The first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (MacNicol qq.8-15, here qq.19-34) is particularly close to MacNicol and contains only one new couplet 21cd which complements the MacNicol couplet 12. The non-dialogue quatrain (MacNicol q.18, Irvine q.11) has been expanded into qq.25-26 by the elaborative couplets 25cd and 26ab; q.26 is marked by black inverted commas but if this is intended to indicate Kennedy's own work he wrongly claims q.26cd. A variant of MacNicol q.18cd is also found in q.29cd. The second Cairbre-Osgar dialogue (MacNicol qq.16-17) is represented by qq.27-28. Q.29 appears to represent the night before the battle but consists of Irvine q.14ab combined with a variant of the second couplet of the non-dialogue quatrain. The general battle description begins with qq.30-31 which represent Irvine q.15 expanded into two quatrains; this is followed by a long passage (qq.32-58) marked as Kennedy's own.<sup>79</sup> The parallel material resumes with the list of Osgar's victims (MacNicol qq.22-29, here qq.59-75). This list has no equivalent to MacNicol q.23 but incorporates a reworked version of MacNicol q.21 (part of the previous episode) as well as the new quatrains 61, 65, and 68-74. Qq.76-77 represent the combat between Cairbre and Osgar (MacNicol qq.29-30). In Art's death (MacNicol qq.31-32, here qq.78-79) qq.78cd and 79cd do not correspond to the MacNicol quatrains but seem to have undergone reworking. Osgar's last deed (MacNicol qq.33-34, here qq.80-82) has no equivalent to the MacNicol couplet 33 and qq.80-81 are not represented elsewhere. Qq.83-107 represent Kennedy's version of *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis*.<sup>80</sup> There is no trace of the episode of Osgar's speech and Fionn's arrival as in MacNicol, and Irvine's new qq.26-30 are likewise absent. The Fionn-Osgar dialogue (MacNicol qq.36-39, here qq.108-118) has no equivalent to MacNicol qq.38-39, q.108ab corresponds to Irvine's q. 34ab and q.115cd represents Irvine q.33cd. The remaining qq.108ab, 109, 110, 113, 114, and 116-118 are not paralleled elsewhere although only q.117 is marked as Kennedy's own. Qq.113 and 118 are marked with a line in the first collection but whether this is to be interpreted as an indicator of Kennedy's own work

<sup>78</sup> He marks his own material in inverted commas in red ink in the second collection and indicates his own work in the first collection by brief comments to that effect. Neither method appears to be comprehensive or even reliable.

<sup>79</sup> The first collection only marks qq.35-58.

<sup>80</sup> This is discussed in this chapter, section b: *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*.

is unclear. Fionn's and Oisean's laments take up qq.119-145 (MacNicol qq.35-44, Irvine qq.31-41); not paralleled elsewhere are qq.120, 123-125, 127-136, 139-140, and 143-144. Of these, qq. 127-135, 140, and 143-144 are marked as Kennedy's own. The quatrains which have parallels in MacNicol and Irvine appear in the following order: 119 = MacNicol 44, 121 = MacNicol 43, 122 = MacNicol 42, 126 = MacNicol 35, 137 = Irvine 36, 138 = Irvine 37, 141 = MacNicol 40, and 142 = MacNicol 41.

An intriguing reference is found in Kennedy's own q.143 in which line c mentions Garabh mac Mornna who does not appear anywhere in the extant versions of the Scottish Variant but an Oscar Gharidh appears in q.93 of Kennedy's *Innis duinn a Fhearghuis*, another of Kennedy's own quatrains. It appears that Kennedy had access to *Cath Gabhra* traditions other than a version of the Scottish Variant that shared features with MacNicol and Irvine. It is, however, more usual for Kennedy's own material to elaborate on aspects already present in the version he based his own texts on. Occasionally, this involves attempts to reconcile his text with James Macpherson's work although on the whole Kennedy's quatrains are reasonably competent imitations of ballad idiom. Material which corresponds to other versions often shows a greater amount of verbal variation than encountered in other Scottish Variant versions. It is entirely possible that Kennedy did not only rework his material on a structural level but also made changes to his texts on a verbal level. The differences between his two collections would seem to point in this direction as well. Comparing passages from the first Cairbre-Osgar dialogue the extent of variation between Kennedy and MacNicol is obvious:

q. Kennedy	q. MacNicol
21 <i>Cho bfhulair leam iomlaid cinn,</i> <i>'S cho 'n aidmhichain caochla' crainn;</i> <i>Uait Oscair an leadain amalaich,</i> <i>Cho 'n fhuilair leam air a bhall so.</i>	12 <i>Cha buillair liom Imlait Cinn</i> <i>Cha 'n aidichin Caoichlaigh Croinn</i>
22 <i>Iomlaid cinn gun chaochla' crainn,</i> <i>B' ea-corach r'a iarruidh choidhch;</i> <i>'S e fáth ma 'n iarradh tu 'n ath-chuing,</i> <i>Mise bhi gun Fhiann gun Athair.</i>	13 <i>Imlait Cinn gun Imlait Croinn</i> <i>Begarich shud iarruidh orrum</i> <i>Gur he Fa man Shiridh du shinn</i> <i>Mishe bhi gun Fhian gun athair</i>



23 *Ge do bhiodh thu, s d' Fhiann is d' Athair, 14 Gad a bhigh an Fhian as Tathair*  
*Ceart mar bha iad riamh r' a 'n latha; Mar 's fear gan ro iad nam Bethidh*  
*Cho b' fhuilair leamsa gu dheimhinn, Cha buillair leom fo na Fianibh*  
*Aon séud a dh' iarrainn gu fuighinn. Gach aoin ni dhiarrin gun faithin*<sup>81</sup>

24 *Na 'm bithinsa 's 'm Fhiann is m' Athair, 15 Nan bithidh an Fhian as mathair*  
*Ceart mar bha sinn riamh r' ar latha; Mar a bha iad riabh nam Bethidh*  
*Cho 'n fhuigheadh tu Chairbnidh dhuinn, Cha 'naithidh uissa a Riogh*  
*Do dh' Eirinn lead do dh'a bhuinn. Liad do dha Thraidh an Erin.*

The four texts beginning with the Caoilte-introduction - five if Kennedy's second text is included - are likely to represent a strand of tradition with a strong Argyll-Perthshire connection.<sup>82</sup> The fact that Smith's text is followed by a copy of Stone's version of *Chan abair...* may indicate an origin of his text in this area as well. Irvine's version with its unequivocal oral pedigree is of particular value here while Kennedy's texts and the uncertain extent of Kennedy's own material are at best ambiguous.

## Section d: Short and Fragmentary Versions

Collecting activity in the second half of the nineteenth century has yielded a number of fragments and short texts. Most of them belong to the Scottish Variant and a significant number of the fragments concentrates on the emotional aspects of Osgar's death. Two of them have few parallels in the Scottish Variant and another two have accretions from other ballads. Three short texts preserve the plot of the Scottish Variant in an abbreviated form.

Only one fragment has been published.<sup>83</sup> This was collected in 1871 from an unnamed reciter, described as a 'very estimable man' by the collector, J.G. Campbell, and consists of seven quatrains, two of them incomplete. The text begins *Is muladach mi 'n deigh Chaoilte* but is not closely related to any of the complete texts that have

<sup>81</sup> Glossed (*sheoid*).

<sup>82</sup> Although Kennedy's collecting activities took him as far as Lochaber he does not tell where he got the text he based his version on. Comparison with the other two texts indicates a possible Argyll-Perthshire link.

<sup>83</sup> J.G. Campbell: *The Fians*; pp.163-164.

the same initial line. The Caoilte-sequence consists of 2½ quatrains which correspond to Irvine qq.1 and 2 but with the equivalent of MacNicol q.1cd forming the second couplet of q.1. This is followed by 3¾ quatrains beginning *An cuala sibhse turus Fhinn* which correspond approximately to Macfarlane qq.1-4 and tell of Fionn's absence, Cairbre's enmity, and the invitation to the feast at Tara. Q.1b, however, is close to Irvine's q.3b. It is interesting to note that seventy years after Irvine's text was taken down a version of this type still existed in an oral context. The collector does not indicate the provenance of his version and whether the reciter knew any more of this ballad. The beginning of the fragment is almost complete, judging by other texts of the same type. It seems possible that the collector did not take down all that the reciter had to offer because a preceding version of *Duan na Ceardach*, by a different reciter, is very good by nineteenth century standards but ends equally abruptly.

### The unconnected texts

NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. Text C consists of three quatrains of lament for Osgar.<sup>84</sup> The text was written down by Alexander Carmichael but no further information is given. If a note in *PTWH* 4 refers to the same piece, entitled *Oisean a Caoidh Osgair*, the reciter was Hector MacDonald of Skye and the collecting date approximately 1860. MacDonald's source was his father who is said to have known all of the 'published' (i.e. Gaelic) Ossian.<sup>85</sup> The text, beginning *Cia fada thuiteas na deoir*, is very close to the Gaelic translation of Macpherson's 'Temora' and is found in *Duan* 1 of *Tighmora*. Qq.1 and 2 correspond to ll. 409-416 and q.3 to ll.380-383.<sup>86</sup> Differences between text C and the printed original indicate that this fragment came from the printed text and entered the oral context at some point between 1807, the date when the first edition of the Gaelic 'Ossian' appeared, but before c.1860, in order for the changes to be implemented. It appears that only one stage of oral transmission was involved, between Hector MacDonald and his father. Considering that thematic contact has taken place between 'Temora' and the Scottish Variant,<sup>87</sup> it is appropriate to note that two aspects of the fragment provide a link to the ballad tradition. The text is put in the mouth of Oisean who laments the death of Osgar and also the demise of the heroes of old, a theme that is at best subordinate in most Scottish *Cath Gabhra* texts. The theme of Fionn's shedding of tears for Osgar, on the other hand, is

<sup>84</sup> Text A is discussed in this section, sub-section: Fragments with accretions, and Text B in sub-section: The lament.

<sup>85</sup> *PTWH* 4, pp.424-425.

<sup>86</sup> *Dàna Oisein mhic Fhinn*. pp.214-215.

<sup>87</sup> See this chapter, introductory paragraph.

a prominent one and appears in the Scottish Variant (e.g. G.A q.56) and in *Mór anocht mo chumha féin* (e.g. McLagan, q.31) but here it is implied that Oisean is weeping. There is no textual overlap in this line. It is possible that q.1d, *Neart Oscar a chaoidh cha'n eirich*, is modelled on a line in the Scottish Variant, *Gu la bhrath chan eirich Osgar* (G.A q.57d).

Captain Alexander Matheson's *Bas Oscair - Cath Gairbheach* was acquired in 1892 by Alexander Carmichael and is extant in C.-W.339. Matheson, of Dornie, Kintail, did not provide Carmichael with other ballad texts but contributed material concerning the genealogy of the Mathesons to C.-W.32, a manuscript connected with Alexander MacBain rather than Carmichael. Matheson appears as translator of an eighteenth century Gaelic poem in Carmichael's manuscript C.-W.123, and has contributed material to C.-W.363. It is likely that he was a collector rather than the reciter of the text. *Cath Gairbheach*, usually the Gaelic name for the Battle of Harlaw in 1411, is probably in error for *Cath Gabhra* or one of the usual variants. The fragment of 2½ quatrains does not link up to any extant *Cath Gabhra* ballad or Macpherson's 'Temora.' The incident that qq.1 and 2 appear to refer to is not part of any traditional account of *Cath Gabhra*; it is, however, part of a sequence of interpolated quatrains (40, 41, and 44) that are found in the MacCallum collection.<sup>88</sup> Here, Oisean encourages Osgar, who is apparently wounded, to stand up and face a band of enemies. Osgar, propped up by his spear, replies that if he is seen standing up an unnamed person (*seisean*) will not approach. Q.3 refers to an unnamed woman who remembers Oisean, Cairbre, and her two dead sons; there are, however, no female characters in any *Cath Gabhra* text except for the fairy washerwoman in the Scottish Variant who fulfils a specific function there. The idea that men dare not approach a famous enemy for as long as he looks alive and capable of defending himself is present in the account of Cú Chulainn's death. The hero props himself up against a standing stone and only when the Morrigan in the shape of a raven flies close to him do his enemies realise that he is dead.<sup>89</sup> I am not aware, however, of a similar tradition in connection with Osgar or indeed any character from the Fionn-context.

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<sup>88</sup> See this chapter, section c, sub-section: *Chan abair mi mo thriath ri m' cheòl* (the MacCallum text of *Chan abair...*).

<sup>89</sup> Van Hamel: *Compert Con Culainn* ; pp.111-113.

## Fragments with accretions

It would seem that the fragment of *Laoidh Osgair* collected in 1871 by J.F. Campbell from the Tobermory weaver William Robertson is not representative of the abilities of the reciter.<sup>90</sup> Although Campbell did not write down Robertson's entire version he noted that the washerwoman-sequence was unknown to the reciter. Campbell's reference may indicate that the rest of Robertson's version belonged to the Scottish Variant and this would seem to be corroborated by q.2 which is close to its equivalent in other Scottish Variant texts, e.g. G.A q.59. Q.1cd would appear to be a development from a couplet like G.A q.63ab. These two passages also have equivalents in *Mór anocht mo chumha féin*, e.g. Campbell of Portree, qq.27ab and 28, but textually they appear to be closer to the Scottish Variant although the sample is too small to furnish conclusive evidence. Q.1ab is an accretion from a different context, that of Deirdre and the three sons of Uisneach. It is possible that the couplet in question is a development from the common opening couplet of the Deirdre-ballad, e.g. Gillies q.1ab, but again there is not enough material present in the fragment to be conclusive.

NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. Text A is a puzzling piece. It was sent to J.F. Campbell by an unnamed correspondent who seems to have copied the fragment from somewhere since the orthography differs in the collector's introductory note and in the text itself. I have not been able to identify a source for qq.1 and 2; a reference to *cath Mhannuis* in the title may have been inspired by the mention of *Rìgh Lochlann* in q.1c but the two quatrains do not appear to have any link to the *Mànus-ballad*. I have not been able to identify a possible source for this sequence in any of the other ballads which feature a king of Lochlann. Qq.3 and 4 are close to BDL XXI, *Innis dúinn, a Fhearghuis*, qq.1 and 2. The couplet 5 does not appear to be derived from any *Cath Gabhra* ballad and may even be a passage provided by the reciter to form a link between the Fearghus File passage and qq.6 and 7. These correspond roughly to Gillies A qq.57 and 60, or to Campbell of Portree's qq.29 and 33 (*Mór anocht...*). It is not possible to determine whether the Scottish Variant or *Mór anocht...* provided these two quatrains. A version of each ballad is combined with *Innis dúinn, a Fhearghuis* in MacMurchy's manuscripts.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup> For the text, from NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.4., see Appendix, part 2, Scottish Texts: section c: Short and Fragmentary Texts. See also *ibid.* footnote 61.

<sup>91</sup> See this chapter, section b: *Innis dúinn a Fhearghuis*.

## The lament

Alexander Carmichael took down five quatrains of *Bas Osgair* from the Skye reciter Coinneach Moirristean (Kenneth Morrison) in 1861. Three copies of the text by Carmichael survive in NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. Text B, in C.-W.112, and in C.-W.224.<sup>92</sup> Morrison learned his ballad repertoire from Iain Donnullach (John MacDonald) of Talisker, a noted reciter of ballads; NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12. contains other examples of Morrison's ballads.

The fragment is derived from the Scottish Variant. Qq.1-3 are part of Fionn's lament for Osgar and correspond to G.A qq.57, 59 (ll.c and d conflated), and 58. Qq.4 and 5 belong to the Fionn-Osgar dialogue. Fionn's quatrain combines the equivalents of G.A qq.54b (preceded by a new line) and 51cd while Osgar's answer has G.A qq.52ab and 55cd. Despite some textual overlap with Gillies it is unlikely that Morrison's fragment is directly derived from the printed text although the sample is too small to allow a definite conclusion. Several factors advocate independence from the Gillies text. The two plot episodes represented in the fragment appear in reversed order in the complete versions; and the fragment's two quatrains of dialogue are composite ones. It would be reasonable to expect more of the ballad's plot to be represented in a Gillies-descended text, even allowing for the possibility that Morrison was not a practised reciter as Carmichael's comments in C.-W.224 appear to imply.<sup>93</sup> By comparison, Morrison also recited a version of *Cath [Mac] Rìgh Sorach*, beginning *La dhuinn air bheagan sloigh*, to Carmichael in 1862. This ballad, also derived from John MacDonald, presents an abbreviated but intact plot and is not directly related to the version of the same ballad in the Gillies collection.<sup>94</sup> It is thus likely that the *Bas Osgair* fragment is not representative of Morrison's ability as a reciter.

## The short versions

### Iain Donnullach (John MacDonald)

C.-W.105 contains c.15 quatrains of *Bas Osgair* collected in 1865 by Alexander Carmichael from Iain Donnullach (John MacDonald) of Locheport, North

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<sup>92</sup> The NLS text forms the basis of the text in Appendix, part 2, Scottish Texts: section c: Short and Fragmentary Texts. Relevant differences to the C.-W. copies are given in footnotes.

<sup>93</sup> Appendix, part 2, Scottish Texts: section c Short and Fragmentary Texts; introductory notes to the text.

<sup>94</sup> Extant copies are in NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.12, NLS.Adv.MS.50.2.6., C.-W.112, and C.-W.103A.



Uist.<sup>95</sup> The reciter learned his text from Ruair Mac Lemein<sup>96</sup> of Malacleit and adds the remark that the landlord gave land to the source reciter for his *duans* - perhaps an example of a late instance of patronage. The text belongs to the Scottish Variant and begins with a prose introduction which outlines Fionn's absence, Cairbre's invitation to Osgar, and the beginning of their quarrel. The ballad itself presents a very compressed plot consisting of the quarrel between Osgar and Cairbre which does not, however, mention the exchange of spears (qq.1 and 2) Then follow two quatrains about Osgar's victim's (qq.3 and 4), and q.5 which tells how Osgar killed Cairbre. The couplet 6 states that only Art mac Cairbre and Osgar are alive at this stage; then qq.7-9 describe the combat between Art and Osgar. Fionn's arrival and the dialogue between Fionn and Osgar take up qq.10-13. In the couplet 14 Osgar asks to be carried away and the incomplete q.15 relates how the *Fian* mourn Osgar's death.

It appears that this text presented Carmichael with some difficulties as his line divisions in qq.2, 7, and 11 differ from the usual ones.<sup>97</sup> This would seem to indicate that the reciter's delivery did not give obvious clues as to where one line ended and where the next one began. 6, although written as a couplet, is a prose sentence. 8 and 9, although presented as quatrains, are prose as well but both are verbally close to certain quatrains of the Scottish Variant; the couplet 10 begins with a line of poetry but then continues as prose. Similarly, 15 is prose rather than poetry. It is likely that this text demonstrates the transition of a ballad into the medium of prose. This may be MacDonald's fault; if his source was involved in a kind of 'patronage deal' it is reasonable to infer that he was a talented reciter with good ballad versions at his disposal. Moreover, no further information appears to be available regarding MacDonald or his repertoire which perhaps indicates that he did not have much to offer to Carmichael.

A recognisable but not close textual relationship between this text and G.A can be identified in the following cases: 1 = G A 19cd, 2 = G A 20, 4 = G A 38, 7 = G A 43, 10 = G A 42a, 11 = G A 51, 12 = G A 52, 13cd = G A 53ab, and 14 = G A 47cd. Further removed are 3, corresponding to G A 37, and 5, corresponding to G A 35. The prose passages 8 and 9 do not have any direct G.A parallels but would seem to owe something to G.A qq.52cd and 53ab; there appears to be a degree of confusion here between Osgar's combat with Cairbre, which is usually described in those terms, and Osgar's combat with Art which is narrated without this kind of gory

<sup>95</sup> Appendix, part 2, Scottish Texts: section c: Short and Fragmentary Texts. The reciter is not to be confused with his Skye namesake referred to in the previous sub-section.

<sup>96</sup> Perhaps an example of a combination of Carmichael's unorthodox spelling combined with his difficult handwriting (for Ruairi MacLennein?). R. Black informs me that a name MacLeman exists.

<sup>97</sup> As indicated in the transcript.

detail. While MacDonald's version cannot claim to be descended from G.A directly, it is possible that its parent version - if it is correct to assume that it was better - may have derived from the printed text.

#### Patrick Smith's version and its relative

Alexander Carmichael collected a text of 11 quatrains from the South Uist reciter Patrick Smith in 1869. The text survives only in C.-W.7 and is clearly a copy, probably from Carmichael's field notes. Carmichael himself notes at the beginning of the manuscript that it contains transcribed material. Errors of anticipation typical of a scribal or copying context occur in the text; in a number of instances it appears that Carmichael had difficulties deciphering his exemplar since he offers some variant readings with question marks attached. A related version, also of 11 quatrains, is extant in GUL.MS.Gen.1090(27), a manuscript belonging to the Henderson collection; the text is in Alexander Carmichael's hand as well.

Smith suggests that his source was Niall Donnullach (Neil MacDonald) of Leth mheadhonach who died in c.1850 at the age of c.75. In 1860, Hector MacLean took down Smith's version and used it to provide variant readings to Donald MacPhie's version in PTWH 3.<sup>98</sup> I have not been able to track down MacLean's text of 1860 in order to compare Smith's two recorded versions; MacLean's manuscript version in NLS.Adv.MS.50.1.5. agrees closely with the printed text. Smith's text cannot be reconstructed satisfactorily because MacPhie's longer text was given priority by MacLean. The one quatrain that was supplied from Smith's version (MacPhie q.35 = Smith q.3) is virtually identical in Carmichael's manuscript and in the printed text.

MacPhie's and Smith's texts are preceded by prose introductions. MacPhie places Fionn and the *Fian* firmly in a Scottish context and explains the fact that the action takes place in Ireland by making Ireland a favourite hunting-ground of the *Fian* where they had a house in Cairbre's territory. Fionn goes hunting and leaves Osgar in charge of the house.<sup>99</sup> The ballad is then put into an Oisean-Patrick frame. Smith's introduction varies considerably from comparable passages in the extant versions. It states that there is only one means of killing Osgar and that Cairbre, for unexplained reasons, wants to kill him. Cairbre gives his sister to Osgar in marriage and she finds out that Osgar can only be killed by his own spear when it is heated

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<sup>98</sup> PTWH 3, p.345.

<sup>99</sup> John MacDonald's introductory prose passage mentions that Osgar is left in charge of Fionn's house. There is, however, no close textual relationship.

until it glows white. Cairbre acquires the weapon by an exchange of spears, challenges Osgar to battle and wounds him fatally with a spearcast. Although there is a clear memory of the plot of the Scottish Variant in the exchange of spears the motivation for the quarrel between Osgar and Cairbre belongs to the folktale, with the international motifs of 'secret of vulnerability disclosed by hero's wife' (K2213.4.1.) and 'death by unique deadly weapon' (Z312.)<sup>100</sup> Another ballad context for the related motif of unique vulnerability in a particular place is the death of Diarmaid as described in *Laoidh Dhiarmaid*, another of the important warrior elegies among the ballads.<sup>101</sup>

Since the prose introduction has already disposed of the combat of Cairbre and Osgar the ballad proper begins with three quatrains describing Osgar's victims; qq.1 and 2 correspond approximately to G.A qq.37 and 38 and q.3 has no equivalent in any other Scottish variant text except the related text in the Henderson collection. This is followed by Fionn's arrival in q.4 (G.A q.56), which duplicates l.c to compensate for the loss of l.d, and the beginning of Fionn's lament in q.5 (G.A q.57). Qq.5 and 6 (G.A qq.51 and 52) give the dialogue between Fionn and Osgar, then the lament continues in qq.8 and 9 (G.A qq.59 and 60). Q.10 (G.A q.61) describes how Osgar is borne away to Fionn's house and the ballad concludes with a reference to Osgar's last deed in q.11. (G.A q.46). This final quatrain shows some textual overlap with Irvine q.25 but this is the only instance of a noticeable textual relationship between the two texts. Smith's version stands apart in not mentioning the fact that Osgar killed Cairbre; a reference in q.11 is doubtful since it is one of Carmichael's variant readings.

It is likely that Smith learned the ballad in an incomplete state as he was a competent teller of stories and reciter of ballads.<sup>102</sup> He may even be responsible for the introductory passage, which differs significantly from other prose passages connected with Scottish Variant texts, in order to provide a complete and plausible context for his ballad. The related text indicates that Smith's version is descended from a distinct type within the Scottish Variant.

The text in the Henderson collection does not provide any information regarding reciter, provenance, or collecting date. A version of the Scottish Variant, beginning *Fios thainig bho Chainbi Ruadh*, in the same manuscript is not related to

<sup>100</sup> Cross, *Motif-Index*, pp.383 and 536 respectively.

<sup>101</sup> See also *ibid.* pp.535-536. Motifs Z.310 (Unique Vulnerability) and Z.311 (Achilles Heel) are of particular interest here.

<sup>102</sup> Some of his repertoire is listed in *PTWH* 4, pp.404, 406, and 416.

the short text.<sup>103</sup> No other copy of the text appears to be extant. The text has 11 quatrains, two of them incomplete, but overlap with Smith's version is only partial. Where the two versions parallel each other, the texts are close enough to demonstrate a direct relationship in a context of oral transmission. There is no introductory prose passage in this text and it presents a more complete account of Osgar's death than Smith's. Smith's q.1 is missing; qq.1 and 2 tell of Osgar's victims and parallel Smith's qq.2 and 3. Qq.3-5 (G.A qq.41, 42 (lacking b), and 43) deal with the combat between Cairbre (here: Cainbi Ruadh) and Osgar and give Osgar's challenge to Cairbre's son. Fionn's lament and the dialogue with Osgar are represented by qq.6-8 although Smith's q.6, Fionn's dialogue quatrain, has dropped out. The final sequence, qq.9-11, appears in the order Smith qq.11, 9, and 10 without an equivalent for Smith's q.8 and consists of Osgar's last deed, another quatrain of lament, and Osgar's being borne away to Fionn's house.

All three short texts display an awareness of Osgar's status as a major figure in Fionn-tradition. The enmity with Cairbre is remembered although it is unclear how well understood the background to it was; Smith's introduction in particular differs considerably from the motivation presented by full Scottish Variant texts. The emphasis lies clearly on the emotional aspect of Fionn's last meeting with his dying grandson, a thematic bias that is given prominence in all *Cath Gabhra* ballads, whether, Scottish or Irish in provenance, whether complete or fragmentary, or whether from an oral or a scribal environment.

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<sup>103</sup> This is discussed in this chapter, section c, sub-section: *Chan abair mi mo threith ri m' cheòl* (Henderson's text of *Chan abair...*).

## **Conclusions**

### **Findings of the Present Study**

The present study has shown that neither the scribal nor the oral environment produced completely stable ballad texts. The scribal context that prevailed in Ireland has resulted in the development of distinct types of texts which may have the status of localised ecotypes. Since only a sample of the Irish material has been used above, this observation is in need of refinement in the light of an extended number of texts.

The predominantly scribal mode of transmission in Ireland has led to comparatively greater textual stability while Scottish texts, even those with a proven or very likely scribal or manuscript background, consistently exhibit traits that are likely to be predominantly connected with an oral mode of transmission. Scottish texts also show a greater amount of variation at all levels. The most extensive display of this is given by the three distinct manifestations of the Scottish Variant which has developed the most satisfactory balance of all texts between narrative and elegy in that it combines a complete and coherent plot, albeit largely unconnected to the other extant *Cath Gabhra* traditions, with passages of lament.

Of particular importance for our understanding of transmissional processes are patterns of innovation that have emerged from detailed study of the textual evidence. Accretion often involves material that has become attached to a suitable context but on occasion connections are tenuous. Patterns of complementary, compensatory, and elaborative innovation have been shown to be primarily connected with maintenance of a text in good condition although not all instances can be regarded as entirely successful. Regarding patterns of loss and abbreviation, it is evident that in most cases the lost material can be demonstrated to be non-essential to the understanding or development of the ballad plot. Material that has been transposed from its original position is in most instances associated with a context that enables a logical connection to be made. The implications of this for the evaluation of the underlying mnemonic processes are, however, still in need of further investigation. The Heroic Code has been shown to be implicated in promoting textual stability by providing material with a formulaic dimension. An important aspect of this is the prominence of visually powerful imagery. The usefulness of the Heroic Code in an oral context in particular is demonstrated by the provision of a wide range of highly adaptable and varied imagery that can be made to suit metrical or stylistic



requirements. It is likely that such imagery, pervasive and often brilliantly realised in Scottish vernacular tradition, contributed significantly to an audience's appreciation and enjoyment of a ballad. Its importance in providing a highly prestigious dimension for the genre, along with the highly-regarded subject matter, is beyond dispute.

Traditions regarding the arguably most disastrous event of the 'history' of the *Fian* have been shown to be disparate. Historical sources either treat the battle of Gabhair in a summary fashion or present accounts which disagree in a number of important details. It is thus not surprising that some of the core ballads telling of aspects of the battle of Gabhair are linked with literary texts rather than historical sources. The ballads themselves do not form a coherent body of material but diverge considerably in their accounts. This is exemplified in particular by the figure of Osgar mac Garaidh who is an important protagonist in some core texts and entirely absent in others. All core ballads, however, agree in emphasising the extent of the disaster that took place in the almost complete slaughter of the men of Ireland and the *Fian* and the death of Osgar the son of Oisín/Oisean represents the outstanding symbol for that disaster. In a number of texts the narrative function of the ballads takes second place after the function of lament and elegy.

The distribution of the various *Cath Gabhra* ballads appears to be not even throughout Ireland and Scotland. This view is derived from the evidence of extant texts which, however, may not represent the situation accurately. Only in texts of *Mòr anocht mo chumha fèin*, the oldest text represented among extant *Cath Gabhra* ballads, is there a significant amount of overlap between versions in both countries. A specifically Irish development is the attachment of ballads with only a tenuous link to the battle of Gabhra to some *Cath Gabhra* ballads. At the level of direct textual relationship, it has been possible to show groups of related texts for ballads that are extant in significant numbers. Evidence at the present time point at the existence of localised variants or ecotypes, particularly in the Irish scribal context.

The shape the ballads took in Ireland and Scotland has been shown to be directly related to the different conditions of society that prevailed in those countries. The persistence of an arguably heroic society in Scotland until the mid-eighteenth century favoured literature with an heroic bias; connected with this was the emergence of an almost exclusively oral literary culture which nevertheless had absorbed important aspects of aristocratic bardic literature. The tradition bearers who found themselves as the guardians of this tradition are likely to have taken their responsibility to maintain the texts in good condition seriously. Appreciative but critical audiences in the *céilidh*-house contributed to the need for textual maintenance. Explanatory material provided by reciters certainly supports this view

and the evidence of complementary, compensatory, and elaborative innovation would seem to point in the same direction. A further stabilising influence comes from printed sources, the Gillies and MacCallum collections in particular. This illustrates the availability of such material to a core of literate individuals in the Highlands. Of greater importance, however, is the fact that material derived from such sources was capable of passing back into the oral context since evidence for a stage of oral transmission between printed volume and reciter can be demonstrated in several instances.

An oral context and its precise significance is difficult to isolate for the Irish material. Instead, a class of learned scribes developed after the demise of the learned poets who made the preservation of prestigious literature one of their goals. A wider spread of literacy maintained a lively manuscript tradition but is also likely to have coloured appreciation of literature by enabling the evaluation of essentially heroic material from an academic point of view. The perceived historical dimension of the ballads may have facilitated such an intellectualised approach. A specialised oral dimension is present in the custom of reading aloud from manuscripts in front of an audience. While the difference to oral transmission is obvious, the nature of the ballads as texts composed for oral performance is likely to have contributed to their accessibility and popularity in such an environment.

### **Future Directions**

The findings of the present study will need to be refined and expanded in the light of more ballads from oral and scribal tradition alike. This is particularly important for the dynamic processes that have been shown to be at work in the oral environment. To facilitate this, it is necessary to make a greater sample of unpublished texts, from Scottish tradition in particular, available for further study of the patterns of development that have been identified for the oral context. It is likely that such text will also furnish further examples for continuity in Scotland between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, an aspect that this thesis has only touched upon briefly.

The wider connections of the ballads with the field of Gaelic literature outwith the context of *fiannaíocht* are also in need of detailed investigation. This will emphasise the early ballad tradition, beginning with the material in the *Acallam na Senórach* and the Book of Leinster, rather than the late Scottish tradition, although Irish manuscript material is likely to furnish evidence for continuity. It is likely that such a study would also bring the literary status of the ballads into clearer focus.

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